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DISCOURSES

RELATING TO

The Evidences of Revealed Religion,

DELIVERED IN THE

CHURCH OF THE UNIVERSALISTS,
AT PHILADELPHIA, 1796.

AND

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF MANY OF THE HEARERS.

BY JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.
&c. &c.

Be ready always to give an anſwer to every man that aſketh you a reaſon of the hope that is in you.

1 PET. iii. 15.

PHILADELPHIA,
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1796.

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To JOHN ADAMS,

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

DEAR SIR,

THE happineſs I have had of your acquaintance and correſpondence ever ſince your embaſſy to England, our common friendſhip for Dr. Price, the ardent friend of liberty and of America, your ſteady attachment to the cauſe of chriſtianity, the favourable attention you gave to the following Diſcourſes, when they were delivered, and the wiſh you expreſſed that they might be publiſhed, induce me to take the liberty to dedicate them to you.

Stateſmen who have the firmneſs of mind to profeſs themſelves Chriſtians, *and who have a juſt ſenſe of the importance of chriſtianity, are not numerous; and thoſe of them who adopt a* rational chriſtianity, *the evidences and doctrines of which will bear to be ſubmitted to the teſt of reaſon, in this age, in which, while many are carried away by the prevailing tide of infidelity, others oppoſe it by an enthuſiaſm which diſclaims the aid of reaſon, are ſtill fewer; and are therefore entitled to the greater eſteem of thoſe who entertain the ſame ſentiments.*

We ſhall, no doubt, ourſelves be ranked with enthuſiaſts by thoſe unbelievers (and by far the greater part of them are of this claſs) who have become ſo without any juſt knowledge of the ſubject, or inveſtigation of the evidence of revelation. But the contempt of ſuch perſons, whatever rank they may hold in the political or the learned world, is itſelf contemptible. Every ſerious inquirer after truth, will reſpect other ſerious inquirers, though their opinions ſhould differ ever ſo much. But the cenſures of men, *whether well or ill informed, will appear of little moment to thoſe who look to the deciſion of the impartial Judge of all. And, mindful of his ſolemn warning, we muſt not be* aſhamed of him, *or of his cauſe, in any circumſtances, however unfavourable, leſt he ſhould be aſhamed of us at a time when his favour will be of infinitely greater moment to us than any thing elſe.*

You and I, Sir, are advancing to a period of life in which theſe views naturally open more and more upon us. We find this world receding, and another faſt approaching, and we feel the importance of having ſomething to look to when the preſent ſcene of things ſhall be cloſed. And whatever we value for ourſelves, it behoves us to recommend to others. You will, therefore, rejoice if an exhibition of the evidences of revealed religion, ſuch as is contained

tained in theſe Diſcourſes, ſhould produce any effect.

It is happy that, in this country, religion has no connection with civil power, a circumſtance which gives the cauſe of truth all the advantage that its beſt friends can deſire. But religion is of as much uſe to Stateſmen as to any individuals whatever. Chriſtian principles will beſt enable men to devote their time, their talents, their lives, and what is often a greater ſacrifice ſtill, their characters, to the public good; and in public life this will often be, in a great meaſure, neceſſary.

Let a man attain to eminence, of any kind, and by whatever means, even the moſt honourable, he will be expoſed to envy and jealouſy, and of courſe he muſt expect to meet with calumny and abuſe. It was the lot of our Saviour himſelf, and it is a part of the wiſe order of providence that it ſhould always be ſo. For, beſides that it is of the greateſt importance to the community, that every perſon in a public ſtation, ſhould have the ſtrongeſt motive for the greateſt circumſpection, unmixed praiſe is what no human mind can bear without injury. An undue elation, which would ſoon be found to be as hurtful to himſelf as unpleaſant to others, would be the neceſſary conſequence

ſequence of it. And what principles can enable a man to conſult the real good of his fellow citizens, without being diverted from his generous purpoſe by a regard to their opinion concerning him, like thoſe of the Chriſtian, who can be ſatisfied with the approbation of his own mind (which of courſe draws after it that of his Maker) and who, though not inſenſible to due praiſe, can deſpiſe calumny, and ſteadily overlooking every thing that is intermediate, patiently wait for the day of final retribution? As theſe principles enabled the apoſtles to rejoice in tribulation, *and perſecution of every kind, ſo the virtuous ſtateſman will not complain of that abuſe which operates ſo favourably both with reſpect to his own mind, and the intereſts of his country. They are Chriſtian principles that beſt enable a man to bear this neceſſary and excellent diſcipline, and form the truly diſintereſted and magnanimous patriot.*

I cannot conclude this addreſs without expreſſing the ſatisfaction I feel in the government which has afforded me an aſylum from the perſecution which obliged me to leave England, perſuaded that, its principles being fundamentally good, inſtead of tending, like the old governments of Europe, to greater abuſe, it will tend to continual melioration. Still, however, my utmoſt wiſh is to live as a ſtran-

ger

ger among you, with liberty to attend without interruption to my favourite purſuits; wiſhing well to my native country, as I do to all the world, and hoping that its intereſts, and thoſe of this country, will be inſeparable, and conſequently that peace between them will be perpetual.

I am, with the greateſt eſteem,

Dear Sir,

PHILADELPHIA,
May, 1796.

Yours ſincerely,

J. PRIESTLEY.

THE PREFACE.

THE Diſcourſes contained in this volume may be conſidered as ſupplemental to thoſe which I delivered in England relating to the ſame ſubject, juſt before I left that country, and which have been re-printed in this. Being requeſted to preach in this city, I thought I could not make choice of any ſubjects more unexceptionable, or more uſeful, than of ſuch as relate to the *evidences of revealed religion*, in an age abounding with unbelievers, many of whom have become ſo merely for want of better information. Being unwilling to go over the ſame ground that I had been upon before, I have made theſe diſcourſes interfere as little as poſſible with the former. Some of the ſame obſervations will, no doubt, be found in both; but they are not many, and of ſuch particular importance, that they cannot be too much impreſſed on the minds of chriſtians.

As

As I had no intention of publiſhing theſe diſcourſes, at leaſt at this time, I did not note the authorities I have made uſe of in them, as there could not have been any propriety, or uſe, in reciting them from the pulpit; and being at a diſtance from my library, I cannot add them now. But they are ſuch as, I am confident, no perſon at all acquainted with the ſubjects will call in queſtion. They were by no means originally collected by myſelf. The far greater part of them have been frequently quoted, and their accuracy never diſputed. I had little to do beſides collecting, arranging, and applying them, in a manner ſomewhat more adapted to my preſent purpoſe. The greater part of them will be found in *Leland's Neceſſity of Revelation*, *Young's Diſcourſes on Revelation the Cure of ſuperſtition*, and the *Letters of ſome Jews to Voltaire*, all which works I would recommend to the attentive peruſal of my readers. The doctrines of the heathen philoſophers were almoſt all copied *verbatim* from *Brucker's Hiſtory of Philoſophy abridged by Dr. Enfield*, a truly valuable, accurate, and well digeſted work. The account of the Grecian oracles, and various of their ſuperſtitions, will be found in *Potter's Antiquities of Greece*, a common, but moſt excellent work.

The

The *Second Part of Mr. Paine's Age of Reaſon* being publiſhed in this city during the delivery of theſe Diſcourſes, I thought proper to animadvert upon ſuch parts of it as appeared to me moſt deſerving of notice. I had once thought of replying to this part of the work more at large, as I did to the firſt part; but I afterwards thought that aſſertions ſo extravagant and ill founded as Mr. Paine's generally are, may be ſafely left to have their full effect, as it can only be upon the minds of perſons ſo extremely ignorant and prejudiced, that no refutation would be attended to by them, ſo that it would only be throwing *pearls before ſwine*.

So great is Mr. Paine's ignorance with reſpect to ſubjects of this nature, that he maintains, page 35, that the book of Job has "all the "circumſtantial evidences of being an original "book of the Gentiles," principally becauſe he finds in it the mention of *Orion*, *Arcturus*, and the *Pleiades*, which are Greek words; when theſe terms occur only in tranſlations, thoſe in the original being quite different. Surely he had acceſs to ſome unbelievers, who could have informed him better.

Without deigning to reply to any thing that had been advanced againſt the firſt part of his work, Mr. Paine in this proceeds with an air of inſolent triumph, as if all the advocates

for

of revelation lay proſtrate at his feet, whereas they are looking down upon him, and feel no emotions but thoſe of pity for himſelf, and his deluded followers, *the blind led by the blind.*

There are, however, unbelievers more ignorant than Mr. Paine. M. Volney, Laquinio, and others in France, ſay that there never was ſuch a perſon as Jeſus Chriſt, and therefore, though they may have heard that there are ſuch books as thoſe of the New Teſtament, I conclude that they cannot have read them. Surely ſuch ignorance as this does not mark the *Age of Reaſon.*

I have more than once obſerved that the diſbelief of revelation makes the belief of the being of God of no practical uſe, and that it has, in France, led to ſpeculative atheiſm. In a tract publiſhed at Paris in 1793, intitled *A Letter to a Senſible Woman*, is the following paragraph, p. 25.

"Theiſm is an opinion reſpectable for the "genius, and the virtues, of men who have "embraced it" (referring, in a note to Socrates and Rouſſeau) "no leſs than for the advantage "which this firſt ſtep towards reaſon, on "abandoning the prejudices of infancy, has "been of to mankind. But, after all, it is "but a firſt ſtep, and no perſons would ſtop "there, if they would frankly give way to the "impulſe

" impulſe they have received. No perſon remains " in this intermediate ſyſtem but through want " of reflection, timidity, paſſion, or obſtinacy. " Time, experience, and an impartial examina- " tion of our ideas, will undeceive us. Voltaire, " who was long the apoſtle of theiſm, profeſſed " to doubt towards the cloſe of his life, and " repented that he had been too confident. " Many others have experienced the ſame."

If, then, any perſon be in a ſtate of mind in which he is ſhocked at the idea of abſolute *atheiſm*, let him pauſe before he abandon *revelation*, and give way to what this writer calls *the firſt impulſe*. But on no account let any obſtruction be laid in the way of free enquiry. With the apoſtle (1 Theſſ. v. 2.) let us *prove all things, and hold faſt* only that which ſhall appear to be *good*.

I might have given a curious counterpart to the hypotheſes of the antient philoſophers in thoſe of the moſt diſtinguiſhed of the modern unbelievers. For many of their opinions concerning the origin of the univerſe, its ſubſequent revolutions, and other ſubjects connected with religion and morals, are not leſs wild, incoherent, and abſurd; as every theory muſt be that excludes the belief of a God, and a ſuperintending providence. This undertaking, however, has been executed with equal truth and ability in a French work

work, entitled *Les Helviennes, ou Lettres Provinciales Philoſophiques*, in five volumes, 12 mo. 1784. They are called *Provincial Letters* in imitation of thoſe of that title by the famous Paſcal, in which he expoſed the abſurdities of the principles of the Jeſuits, a work of genuine humour, to which this is, in many reſpects, not inferior. It is therefore adapted to afford equal entertainment and inſtruction.

From this excellent work it will be evident that the rejection of revealed religion will be attended with all that diſſoluteneſs of morals for which the antient heathens were remarkable, there being no vice for which ſome of the moſt eminent of modern philoſophical unbelievers have not been advocates; and therefore that, in an advanced ſtate of ſociety, human reaſon has never proved a ſufficient barrier againſt vice. It will alſo be evident that a propenſity to the unreſtrained indulgence of all the paſſions has been the principal cauſe of the prevaling diſpoſition to throw off the ſalutary reſtraints of religion.

Not only are the great Chriſtian virtues of humility, the forgiveneſs of injuries, and the loving of enemies, excluded from the claſs of virtues, and a ſpirit of pride and revenge encouraged; not only is all virtue reduced to mere ſelf-love, the great end of human life repreſented

to

to be the purſuit of pleaſure in the loweſt ſenſe of the word, and ſuicide recommended when this object is no longer attainable; but the very barrier between men and brutes has been thrown down by many eminent unbelievers.

All the antient legiſlators even among the heathens, conſidered the laws of *marriage* as the firſt ſtep towards civilization, and the conjugal and parental relations as, what no doubt they are, the chief ſource of the ſweets of ſocial life. But many modern unbelievers openly plead not only for an unbounded liberty of divorce, but a community of women, and make very light of the vices moſt contrary to nature. What is this but reducing men even lower than the ſtate of brutes? And what can we expect from the natural operation of theſe principles, but the prevalence of thoſe vices, which the apoſtle in his ſecond epiſtle to Timothy enumerates as a ſymptom of the approach of the *laſt times*, which are elſewhere deſcribed as exceedingly calamitous, 2 Tim. iii. 1. *This know, that in the laſt days perilous times ſhall come. For men ſhall be lovers of their own ſelves, &c.* The apoſtle Peter alſo ſays, 2 Pet. iii. 3. *Knowing this that there ſhall come in the laſt days ſcoffers, walking after their own luſts, and ſaying, Where is the promiſe of his coming, &c.* Reflecting on theſe things, we may well ſay with the evangeliſts, after they had related our

Saviour's

Saviour's predictions concerning the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the various ſigns of its approach, *Let him that readeth, underſtand*, Math. xxiv. 15. Mark xiii. 14.

Unbelievers often complain of the difference of opinion among Chriſtians, but their own opinions, even on the ſubject of chriſtianity are as various. The celebrated Mr. D'Alembert, in his *Letters to the late king of Pruſſia* (Œuvres Poſthumes, tom. 14. p. 105.) ſays, "It appears "evident to me, as it does to your majeſty, that "chriſtianity in its origin was nothing but pure "deiſm, that Jeſus Chriſt, the author of it, "was only a kind of philoſopher, the enemy of "ſuperſtition, of perſecution, and of prieſts; "who preached benevolence and juſtice, and "reduced the whole law to the love of our "neighbour, and the worſhip of God in ſpirit "and in truth, and that afterwards, St. Paul, "then the fathers of the church, and laſtly the "councils, unhappily ſupported by the ſovereigns, "changed this religion. I therefore think it would "be doing great ſervice to mankind to reduce "chriſtianity to its primitive ſtate, confining it "to preaching to the people the doctrine of a "God rewarding virtue, and puniſhing vice, "who abhors ſuperſtition, deteſts intolerance, "and who requires of men no other worſhip "than that of loving and aſſiſting one another."

The

The ſcheme of reducing chriſtianity to its primitive ſtate, is, no doubt, excellent, and this writer's idea of that ſtate is not far from the truth. But his aſſertion that Jeſus Chriſt taught *pure deiſm*, is altogether unfounded, If there be any truth in his hiſtory, he taught the doctrine of a *reſurrection*, and ſupported it by miracles; and Paul was far from making any addition to the doctrine of his maſter. He had too many enemies among chriſtians to have had that in his power. How chriſtianity was corrupted afterwards is well known, and I have ſhewn the progreſs of it in my *Hiſtory of the Corruptions of Chriſtianity*.

Since the writing of this Preface, I have been favoured with a ſight of the third volume of 'Aſiatic Antiquities,' a work which promiſes to throw great light on the mythology, and early hiſtory, of ſeveral antient nations; and one paſſage in it, containing a quotation from an antient Hindoo writer, perhaps nearly as old as Moſes, is ſo curious in itſelf, and ſuch a confirmation of one part of his hiſtory, that I am perſuaded my readers will be pleaſed with the communication of it. The work is intitled *Padma-puran*, and the tranſlation of it is by Sir William Jones. Though the narrative is in ſubſtance the ſame with that of Moſes, they differ in ſo many circſtances, that it is evident the writers did not copy from one another.

" To Satyavarman, that ſovereign of the " whole earth, were born three ſons, the eldeſt " Sherma, then Charma*, and thirdly Jyapeti " by name. They were all men of good morals, " excellent in virtue, and virtuous deeds, ſkilled " in the uſe of weapons, to ſtrike with, or to be " thrown, brave men, eager for victory in bat- " tle. But Satyavarman being continually de- " lighted with devout meditation, and ſeeing his " ſons fit for dominion, laid upon them the bur- " den of government.

" Whilſt he remained honouring and ſatisfy- " ing the gods, and prieſts, and kine; one day, " by the act of deſtiny, the king, having drank " mead, became ſenſeleſs, and lay aſleep naked. " Then was he ſeen by Charma, and by him " were his two brothers called. To whom he " ſaid, " What now has befallen. In what " ſtate is this our ſire? By thoſe two was he " hidden with clothes, and called to his ſenſes " again and again.

" Having recovered his intellect, and perfect- " ly knowing what had paſſed, he curſed Char- " ma, ſaying, Thou ſhalt be the ſervant of " ſervants, And ſince thou waſt a laughter in " their preſence, from laughter ſhalt thou acquire " a name. Then he gave to Sharma the wide " domain

* Colonel Wilford obſerves, that in the vulgar dialects *Charma* is uſually pronounced *Cham*, and *Sharma*, *Sham*.

" domain on the ſouth of the ſnowy mountain. " And to Jyapeti he gave all on the north of rhe " ſnowy mountain; but he, by the power of " religious contemplation, attained ſupreme " bliſs."

Sir William Jones had before advanced a conjecture that the *Afghans* might be of Hebrew extraction, and part of the ten tribes that were carried into captivity by the Aſſyrians. In his 'Anniverſary diſcourſe,' prefixed to this volume, he ſays, p. 6. " There is ſolid ground for be- " lieving that the Afghans are deſcended from the " Jews, becauſe they ſometimes in confidence " avow that unpopular origin, which in general " they ſedulouſly conceal, and which other muſ- " ſelmen perpetually aſſert; becauſe *Hazaret*, " which appears to be the *Aſereth* of Eſdras, is " one of their territories, and principally be- " cauſe their language is evidently a dialect of " the ſcriptural Chaldaic."

Laſtly, after reciting the unfavourable character given of the Jews by their enemies, and acceding to it, for which I am far from ſeeing ſufficient reaſon, he ſays, p. 15, " They had " the peculiar merit, among all the races of men " under heaven, of preſerving a rational and " pure ſyſtem of devotion, in the midſt of a wild " polytheiſm, inhuman or obſcene rites, and a " dark labyrinth of errors, produced by igno- " rance, and ſupported by intereſted fraud. " Theological inquries," he adds, " are no part " of

" of my preſent ſubject, but I cannot refrain " from adding, that the collection of tracts which " from their excellence, we call *the ſcriptures*, " contain, independently of a divine origin, " more true ſublimity, more exquiſite beauty, " purer morality, more important hiſtory, and " finer ſtrains both of poetry and eloquence, " than could be collected within the ſame com- " paſs from all other books that were ever com- " poſed in any age, or in any idiom. The two " parts of which the ſcriptures conſiſt, are con- " nected by a chain of compoſitions" (meaning the prophetical books) " which bear no reſem- " blance in form or ſtyle to any that can be " produced from the ſtores of Grecian, Indian, " Perſian, or even Arabian, learning. The " antiquity of theſe compoſitions no man doubts, " and the unſtrained application of them to " events long ſubſequent to their publication, is " a ſolid ground of belief, that they were genuine " productions, and conſequently inſpired."

When I compare the decided opinion of ſuch a man as Sir William Jones, in which all men of learning will concur, with the confident aſſertions of Mr. Paine, who ſays that the books of ſcripture are but modern compoſitions, I think of a man either really blind, orwillfully ſhutting his eyes, and declaring that *there is nothing to be ſeen*

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ERRATA.

N. B. *(b)* signifies from the bottom of the page.

Page	line		for	read
41,	2,		*an*,	*our*
45,	7,		*wherever*,	*whenever*
51,	6	*(b)*	*a million*,	*two millions*
101,	1	*(b)*	*made*	*made it*
105,	7	*(b)*	*act*,	*art*
138,	14		*hear*,	*bear*
177,	9	*(b)*	*thoſe*,	*theſe*
182,	13,		*not*,	*not that*
186,	13,		*Democrates*,	*Democritus*
232,	10,		*for*,	*and for*
243,	2	*(b)*	*cannot*,	*could not*
267,	2	*(b)*	*for*	*to*
271,	2,		*ſhall*	*ſhall now*
281,	1	*(b)*	*chargeable*,	*charged*
301,	7,		*an*,	*the beſt*
309,	2,		*that*,	*that though*
326,	1	*(b)*	*Jeruſalem*,	*Jeroboam*
359,	5,		*is*,	*his*
363,	11	*(b)*	*erected*,	*erect*
370,	11,		*lewdeſt*,	*loweſt*
402,	3,		*good*,	*goods*

A

VIEW

OF THE

EVIDENCES OF REVEALED RELIGION.

DISCOURSE I.

The Importance of Religion.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wiſdom; but fools hate knowledge and inſtruction.

PROVERBS, i. 7.

BY the *fear of God* we may very well underſtand *religion* in general, and there can be no doubt but that by religion Solomon meant ſuch principles of it as he held to be the beſt founded, or the revelation by Moſes. And as I propoſe, in a ſeries of diſcourſes, to give a view of the evidences of revealed religion, I ſhall in this ſhow that the ſubject is of *importance*, that the knowledge we receive by means of it is of

real value, tending to exalt the character, and add to the happineſs of man. Indeed if this be not the uſe of religion, it would not be worth our while to make any enquiry into its evidences; becauſe on that ſuppoſition, true or falſe, it would be an uſeleſs and inſignificant thing. The queſtion is the more deſerving of an attentive conſideration, as many, I imagine, moſt, unbelievers, maintain that religion is not merely an uſeleſs, but a hurtful thing, debaſing the mind of man, and adding to the miſeries of his exiſtence, ſo that it is rendering him an eſſential ſervice to free his mind from it.

Now, what is it that the friends of religion, ſay is ſo beneficial, and its adverſaries ſo miſchievous, to man? The principles of religion are acknowledged to conſiſt in the belief of the being, the perfections, and providence of God here, and of a future ſtate of retribution hereafter. The man who believes theſe things is ſaid to have religion, and the man who diſbelieves them, who thinks that there is no God,

God, no providence, or no future ſtate, whatever he be in other reſpects, whether he be virtuous or vicious, cannot be ſaid to have any *religion*, properly ſo called. Let us, then, conſider the nature of theſe principles, and what effect they *muſt* have on thoſe who ſeriouſly believe them. That principles, or opinions, of ſome kind or other, have real influence on the general character, and on the conduct and happineſs of human life, cannot be denied. Man is a thinking being. All his actions proceed from ſome thought or deſign, and his actions and conduct are certainly of importance, iſſuing in a better or worſe ſtate of his circumſtances. If the maxims he acts upon, and the objects of his purſuit, be juſt, and if his meaſures be well laid, he improves his condition; whereas if his maxims of conduct be falſe and fallacious, if the objects of his purſuit be unworthy of him, or his conduct be ill directed, he muſt expect to ſuffer in conſequence.

It alſo cannot be denied that what is called *virtue*, or the right government of

the paſſions, adds to the dignity of man, and to the happineſs both of individuals and of ſociety; and religion certainly comes in aid of virtue. The man who follows the dictates of paſſion, and preſent inclination, without reflecting on the tendency and iſſue of his conduct, is ſure to involve himſelf in difficulties. The unreſtrained indulgence of the natural appetites, both ſhortens life, by introducing diſeaſes and premature death, and makes a ſhort life miſerable; whereas moderation and diſcretion is the ſource of the trueſt and moſt laſting enjoyment. Manhood conducted by mere paſſion and inclination, without foreſight of conſequences, is only a protracted childhood; and what father is there who thinks it wiſe to indulge a *child* in all its varying humours. It would ſoon deſtroy itſelf. And equally deſtructive and ruinous would be the conduct of a *man* who ſhould make no more uſe of his reaſon, but prefer his preſent gratification to future good, which is the general deſcription of *vice*.

Could

Could the moſt intemperate of men have a clear foreſight of all the diſorders and wretchedneſs that will be the ſure, or very probable, conſequence of his conduct, with reſpect to his health and life, and alſo of the poverty and contempt which generally attends that mode of life, whatever might be his fondneſs for any ſpecies of ſenſual indulgence, he would certainly reſtrain himſelf. Alſo, how greedy ſoever any perſon might be of riches, could he foreſee all the anxiety, and riſk, attending a courſe of fraudulent practices, and the little enjoyment men have of diſhoneſt gain, he would be content to be leſs rich and more happy. The ambition of Alexander, of Cæſar, or of Charles the twelfth of Sweden, would have been reſtrained, if they could have ſeen the whole progreſs and termination of their ſchemes.

1. Now religion, both extends the foreſight of man, and puts him under the direction of a being whoſe foreſight is greater than that of any man. When a man

man loſes his natural parent, and guide, religion ſupplies him with another, ſuperior in all reſpects to the former. By religion he puts himſelf under the direction of the Supreme Being, his true parent and beſt friend, on whoſe wiſdom he may always rely, and in whoſe guidance he is ſure to find happineſs. Any rule of life and conduct drawn up by men like ourſelves may be erroneous, being founded on imperfect views of things. The beſt parent may err in the management of his favourite child, whoſe welfare he has moſt at heart. But the great Being who made man can never err. The obſervance of his precepts muſt lead to happineſs; and the full perſuaſion of this, which religion cannot fail to give us, puts an end to all doubt and uncertainty about what we ought to do, ſuperſeding our own judgment, and ſilencing all the evaſions of paſſion and prejudice. And this alone is a circumſtance of unſpeakable advantage.

A perſon bent upon any particular gratification, however criminal, will make a thouſand

a thouſand apologies for the innocence, and perhaps the public utility, of it, which his own reaſon, biaſſed, of courſe, by inclination, might never be able to ſee the fallacy of; which however the authority of an acknowledged maſter will ſilence at once. What has not the ingenuity of libertines pleaded in favour not only of fornication, but even of adultery; and by what ſpecious names have thoſe groſs offences againſt the order, the decency, and peace of ſociety been not only covered from ignominy, but even recommended, as indications of a man's ſpirit, as a ſource of real pleaſure to ſome, and only an imaginary injury to others? How many perſons have actually made their boaſt of actions of other kinds for which they deſerved to be baniſhed from all civilized ſociety? How has murder itſelf, in the form of a duel, and in ſome countries in that of private aſſaſſination, been more than juſtified, from falſe notions of honour, the ſuppoſed dignity of revenge, and the meanneſs of ſubmitting to inſults and wrongs?

We

We ſee that men who have no belief in religion, actually commit theſe crimes, and indeed any other, without remorſe. But this can never be the caſe where there is a principle of religion, where it is really believed that the authority of the Supreme Being has interpoſed, and expreſsly, as by a voice from heaven, abſolutely forbidden the practices above mentioned, how ingeniouſly ſoever apologized for; ſaying to man, *Thou ſhalt not commit murder, thou ſhalt not commit adultery, thou ſhalt not ſteal, &c. &c.*

2. Many perſons, influenced by regard to their reputation, will refrain with ſufficient care from ſuch actions as they know would diſhonour them in the opinion of their fellow creatures; but without a ſenſe of religion they would feel little or no remorſe in committing any crime with reſpect to which they had no ſuſpicion of being detected and expoſed. Religion is a guard againſt even ſecret vices. The belief that nothing is concealed from the eye of God, that he ſees what man cannot ſee,

ſee, diſcerning even the thoughts and inclinations of the heart, will make a man as careful not to offend in private as in public. When the eye of man is not upon him, he well knows there *is* an eye that always ſees him, and that though he might eſcape the cenſure of man, he has no means of eſcaping the righteous judgment of God.

Not only public cenſure, but other puniſhments, often fail to be inflicted on the guilty in this world. A man, therefore, who has no belief in another, may be tempted to riſk a great deal with a reaſonable proſpect of impunity. For of the many crimes that are committed in human ſociety, only a few are actually puniſhed. But this avails nothing to a believer in religion, and a future ſtate. He knows that there is a day coming in which God will judge the world in righteouſneſs, and that no vice, though undetected, and unpuniſhed, here, will eſcape animadverſion and puniſhment hereafter.

Many offenders eſcape puniſhment in this world by means of their power, as well as their addreſs. The rich and the great have, in too many caſes, little to fear from the moſt flagrant violations of juſtice with reſpect to the poor, who are without money and without friends; and the kings and tyrants of the earth, to gratify their revenge, their luſt of power, or mere caprice, ravage whole nations, and introduce an incalculable maſs of miſery among their fellow-creatures, without the moſt diſtant apprehenſions of ſuffering in their own perſons in conſequence of it. But all this ends with the preſent ſcene. In the future the greateſt monarchs will appear on a footing with the meaneſt of rational beings. No wealth or power will be of any avail then, and the knowledge of this may well be ſuppoſed to reſtrain men from thoſe violences and oppreſſions of which they now are the authors. Thus is religion a powerful auxiliary of virtue, and thereby contributes to the good order and peace of ſociety, as well as to the regulation

regulation of the private paſſions, and the happineſs of individuals.

3. Religion is of no leſs uſe with reſpect to the troubles of life, than the duties of it. That, with a great prepondererance of happineſs (which ſufficiently proves the goodneſs of God) there is a conſiderable mixture of miſery in the world, is what no perſon who is at all acquainted with it, will deny. We need not adopt the melancholy deſpairing language of Job, and ſay, *Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble*, or that *he is born to trouble as the ſparks fly upwards;* for this gives an idea of a preponderance of miſery, as the proper and intended lot of man. But certainly there is in the world ſickneſs as well as health, pain as well as pleaſure, and on many accounts grief as well as joy. Induſtry is not always ſucceſsful, marriages are not always happy, children are not always a bleſſing to their parents, and other connections in life, which are generally ſources of pleaſure, are not always ſo.

There

There are alſo many evils againſt which no human prudence can guard us, as famine from inclement ſeaſons, and peſtilential diſorders, which we are as yet unable to inveſtigate, or prevent. All countries are more or leſs ſubject to hurricanes, tempeſts, and earthquakes; and the happieſt and longeſt life muſt terminate in death. It is in vain to ſay, with the Stoics, that what we ſuffer by theſe means are no evils, or that we do not feel them.

But when nature abandons us to grief and deſpair, religion ſteps in to our conſolation, aſſuring us, that nothing can befal us, or others, without the will and appointment of God, our heavenly Father, and that whatever he wills is always wiſeſt and beſt, whether, at the time, we can ſee it to be ſo or not. As the Pſalmiſt ſays, *though clouds and darkneſs are round about him, righteouſneſs and judgment are the habitation of his throne.* Religion aſſures us that, if by means of the evils of life, God chaſtiſes us, it is with the affection of a parent, and always for our good.

We

We can then ſay, with the apoſtle, that *all things will be made to work together for good to them that love God*, that, in this caſe, *life or death, things proſperous, or things adverſe*, are equally *ours*, and will terminate in our advantage. With this perſuaſion we may bear all the evils of life, numerous and heavy as they ſometimes are, not only with patience and reſignation, but even with ſatisfaction and pleaſure, *rejoicing*, as the apoſtles did, *in* all kinds of *tribulation*.

4. But religion is found to be of the greateſt value at the cloſe of life, opening to us a better proſpect than that on which we then ſhut our eyes. Without religion all that the greateſt philoſopher can pretend to is that he has had enough of life, and that he obeys the call of nature without reluctance. But even this, if he has really enjoyed life, is more than he can ſay with truth. If he has enjoyed life, it muſt be ſweet to him, and conſequently he cannot but wiſh to prolong or reſume it. A good man

man may, in one ſenſe, have had enough of life, and, from the fatigues and uniformity of it, be as it were weary of it; but it is only ſuch wearineſs as is felt at the cloſe of an active well ſpent day, when we wiſh for reſt, but with the hope of riſing with renewed vigour and activity, and with the proſpect of greater enjoyment, in the morning. That morning to a chriſtian is the reſurrection to a new and better life. Of this nature gives us no hope; but religion the greateſt certainty.

According to the principles of religion, this world is only the infancy of our being. This life is only a ſchool, in which we are training up for a better and immortal life, and all the events and diſcipline of it are calculated to prepare us for entering with advantage upon it; ſo that a good man, with the faith and hope of a chriſtian, can bid adieu to this world not only with tranquility, but with ſatiſfaction and triumph; ſinging the triumphant ſong, *O death where is thy ſting, O grave where is thy victory.*

When

When chriſtians loſe their friends and relations by death, they do not grieve as the heathen who have no hope; but commit them with confidence to the hands of their merciful creator, whoſe views in calling them into being were not confined to this preſent life. He believes that this his ſeparation from his virtuous friends is but for a time, and a ſhort time, and he has no doubt of meeting them again, and in more favourable circumſtances for enjoying their ſociety than ever. There the affectionate parent will meet his beloved children, and children their parents, not worn down by affliction, diſeaſe, or hard labour, incapable of enjoyment, which is often the caſe in this world, but with all their faculties in full vigour, and ſuperior to what ever they where before; every thing valuable and amiable in them improved, and their imperfections done away; ſo that their ſociety, which we ſhall never loſe again, will be more deſirable than ever. Compared with this ſolid ground of conſolation under the troubles

bles of life, and the fears of death, what has mere reaſon or philoſophy to offer?

5. And it is a particular recommendation of religion, that both its teachings and conſolations require no acuteneſs of intellect. They are level to the underſtandings of all men. As to the precepts of religion, they are thus ſummed up by the prophet, *What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do juſtice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.* In this ſhort compaſs are comprized all the great duties of religion, and ſurely nothing can be more intelligible.

As to the conſolations of religion, they are addreſſed to the common feelings and principles of human nature, ſuch as men act upon every day. It is the expectation of diſtant good as a balance to preſent evil. Religion does not require men to give up their eaſe, their fortunes, or their lives, for nothing; but for a ſufficient recompence. *Thou ſhalt be recompenced* ſaid our Saviour, *at the reſurrection of the juſt.* All that is requiſite is a ſtretch of thought,

and

and a comprehenſion of mind, which ſhall enable men to contemplate a thing certainly future, as if it was preſent: and by this means give it its proper value in compariſon with things preſent, which, in conſequence of being ſo, are poſſeſſed of an undue advantage over them. But what things that are future loſe in this reſpect, is balanced by their real magnitude, and importance. *The things that are ſeen*, ſays the apoſtle (2 Cor. iv. 18) *are temporal, but the things that are unſeen are eternal.* It is, therefore, the more eaſy, by a firm faith, and a ſteady contemplation, to give them their juſt degree of eſtimation, and to feel and act properly with reſpect to them; as thouſands and millions have actually done, who have cheerfully abandoned every thing in life, and life itſelf, when the retaining of them was incompatible with their great proſpects beyond the grave.

6. It is by habituating the mind to contemplate great and diſtant objects, that religion enlarges and ennobles the minds of men, advancing them farther beyond the

ſtate of children, who are only affected by things immediately preſent to them, and from the great bulk of mankind, who do indeed look before them, but not far. They can ſow and plant one year in hope of a return in the next, and they can expend their money in the purchaſe of goods with a view to ſell them to advantage in a future and diſtant market. Alſo, when they labour under any diſorder, they can take diſguſting medicines in the hope of a cure. But this is far ſhort of looking to a world beyond the grave, laying up treaſure in heaven, making friends of the mammon of unrighteouſneſs here, in order to be received into everlaſting habitations hereafter. This is done by the help of religion, which by this means makes a man a ſuperior kind of being to what he was before.

If *great thoughts*, as Lord Bacon ſays, *make great minds*, how much ſuperior muſt be that man who is habitually employed in the contemplation of God, of a providence, and a future ſtate, who ſees the hand of

of God in every thing, and receives all the diſpenſations of providence with a contented and thankful heart, whoſe faith is not ſhaken by all the diſtreſs and calamity of which he is a witneſs, and all that himſelf, his friends, his country, or the world, may ſuffer, and who when he comes to die can look back with ſatisfaction, and forward with hope and joy, to the man who is either wholly ignorant of theſe great principles, or an unbeliever in them, whoſe views are bounded by what he ſees in this life, and who can only ſay, *Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die.* To ſuch perſons life is indeed of little value. And it is no wonder that, under any particular preſſure of trouble or diſappointment, they throw it up, and put an end to their lives in deſpair.

7. Though I have repreſented the religious man as acting on plain and intelligible principles, and as overlooking preſent evils for the ſake of future good, it by no means follows that he will be an intereſted character, and never love virtue for

for its own ſake. It is by a rational ſelf intereſt that the moſt diſintereſted characters are formed. This admits of an eaſy illuſtration from what we know concerning the love of money. The greateſt miſer does not begin with the love of money as an ultimate object, or for its own ſake, but only for the ſake of the advantages it can procure him. And yet we ſee that it is poſſible, in a courſe of time, for men to come to love money, and to employ all their powers, and all their time, in the acquiſition of it, without giving the leaſt attention to the uſe of it, and indeed without ever making any proper uſe of it at all; their ideas never going beyond the mere accumulation of it. Let any thing be purſued, though as a means, and in a courſe of time, it will come to be an end.

In like manner, let a man from any principle, habituate himſelf to reſpect the authority of God, to do good to others, and practiſe virtue in general, though at firſt with no other view than to his reward in a future ſtate, and in time he will live

live virtuouſly, without giving any attention to his ultimate intereſt in it; and in this progreſs he will neceſſarily become as diſintereſtedly virtuous as it is poſſible, in the nature of things, for a man to be. He may begin with the mere *fear* of God, or a dread of his diſpleaſure, but at length he will be actuated by the pureſt *love*, and an entire devotedneſs to his will, as ſuch. He may begin with doing kind offices to others from any motive ſufficient to produce the external action, but at length he will come with the apoſtle, *to love with a pure heart fervently*, taking the greateſt pleaſure in doing kind offices, without any idea, or expectation, of a return. He may at firſt abſtain from ſenſual indulgence from a perſuaſion of what he may ultimately ſuffer in conſequence of it, but in time he will have greater ſatisfaction in moderation than he ever had in exceſs, and he will readily and cheerfully do whatever he apprehends to be *right*, without aſking *why*. The dictates of conſcience will be with him a ſupreme rule of action.

This

This is that truly great and ſublime character to which religion, and religion alone, can raiſe a man. Without the principles of religion, without *the fear of God*, which Solomon juſtly calls *the beginning of wiſdom*, he wants the firſt neceſſary ſtep in this progreſs. There muſt be a belief in the being and providence of God, and in a life of retribution to come, to give a man that comprehenſive view of things, which alone can lead him to overlook temporary gratifications, and give him that due command of his paſſions which is eſſential to rational life. He muſt firſt look beyond the things that are ſeen, and temporal, to things unſeen and eternal, or he might never ſee ſufficient reaſon for the practice of thoſe virtues which do not bring an immediate recompence. He would never reſpect the authority of God, unleſs he had a belief in his being and providence. All his works would be done to be ſeen of men; and if the only reward of virtue was in another world, which he believed to have no exiſtence,

exiſtence, he would have no ſufficient reaſon to exerciſe it at all.

But having this *faith*, the foundation of right conduct, the ſuperſtructure is eaſily raiſed upon it. Poſſeſſed of this firſt principle, a ſeed is ſown, which cannot fail in time to produce the noble and full grown plant, the excellent character above deſcribed. If the mind be thoroughly impreſſed with the fear of God, the two great principles, which compriſe the whole of the moral law, the love of God, and of our neighbour, will in due time appear, and produce all *the fruits of righteouſneſs*, without the leaſt view to any reward whatever; and on this account will be intitled to, and will aſſuredly find, the greateſt. This is to be moſt truly godlike, and the neceſſary conſequence of being *like God*, of being *perfect* (or approaching as near to it as may be) as *God is perfect*, which our Saviour requires and encourages us to be, muſt be accompanied with a degree of happineſs approaching the divine.

Such

Such being the obvious uſe and ſubſtantial value of religion, with reſpect to the conduct of life, the troubles we are expoſed to in it, and at the hour of death, and to form the moſt exalted of human characters, it certainly behoves us to examine the evidence of it, and to do this not ſuperficially, but with the greateſt attention, as a queſtion in the deciſion of which we are all moſt deeply intereſted. I may add that a virtuous and good man cannot but wiſh that the principles of religion may appear to be well founded, becauſe it is his intereſt that they ſhould be ſo; and if there be this bias on our minds in this enquiry, it is a reaſonable and honourable bias, ſuch as no perſon need be aſhamed to avow.

At the ſame time, the greater is the object propoſed to us, the more ſcrupulous we ſhall naturally be in our enquiries concerning it. When the apoſtles were firſt informed of the reſurrection of their beloved maſter, it is ſaid by the hiſtorian, that

that *they did not believe through joy*; and it was not without the moſt irreſiſtible evidence, that of their *ſenſes*, that they were at length ſatisfied with reſpect to it. Let us act the ſame part, and not receive a pleaſing tale merely becauſe it is pleaſing to us, but ſtrictly examine the evidence of it; and this is what I propoſe to lay before you, with the greateſt plainneſs, without concealing any difficulties that appear to me to be worthy of much notice. Chriſt and the apoſtles always appealed to the underſtanding of their hearers, and it can only be a ſpurious kind of *religion* that diſclaims the uſe of *reaſon*, that faculty by which alone we are capable of religion, and by which alone we are able to diſtinguiſh true religion from falſe, and that which is genuine, from the foreign and heterogeneous matter that has been added to it.

DISCOURSE II.

Of the ſuperior Value of Revealed Religion.

He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.

MICAH, vi. 8.

PROPOSING to deliver a ſeries of Diſcourſes on the evidences of revealed religion, I have begun with ſhewing the real value of *religion in general*, conſiſting in a belief of the being and providence of God, and of a future ſtate of retribution. Taking it, therefore, for granted, that this faith is of real value to men, both as individuals and as members of ſociety, I ſhall now endeavour to ſhew that the plan of *communicating* this knowledge by occaſional interpoſitions of the Supreme Being

ing is, in ſeveral reſpects, preferable to that which unbelievers boaſt of as ſuperior to it, viz. the gradual acquiſition of it by the mere uſe of reaſon.

But I would previouſly obſerve that, provided the great *end* be gained, viz. the improvement of the human character by the attainment of ſuch knowledge, and the forming of ſuch habits, as will qualify men to be moſt happy in themſelves, and diſpoſe them to communicate the moſt happineſs to others (which is the great object with God, the common parent of us all) the *means* are of no farther value. That ſcheme, or ſyſtem, whatever it be, which beſt promotes this great end, is, for that reaſon the beſt; and if the two ſchemes be equally adapted to gain the ſame end, they are exactly of equal value.

Religion itſelf is only a means, or inſtrument, to make men virtuous, and thereby happy, in ſuch a manner as rational beings are alone capable of being made happy: and the different kinds,

forms,

forms, rites, or exercises, of religion are of no value but as they tend to make men religious, inspiring them with the fear of God, and a disposition conscientiously to observe whatever he is supposed to require of them. This great truth, which we ought ever to bear in mind, is clearly expressed in my text, *What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God*, i. e. to entertain just sentiments, and observe a right conduct, with respect to God and man; and every thing that God has *shewed* us, whether by the light of nature, or by occasional interpositions, has no other object than this. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good*, what tends to make him virtuous and happy.

Let no person, therefore, value himself on his religion as such, be the principles of it ever so true, his knowlegde of it ever so exact, and his faith in it ever so firm. He is thereby only possessed of a means to a certain end, and if that end be not attained, he is so far from being a

gainer

gainer by being poſſeſſed of the means that he is highly culpable for having ſuch an inſtrument, and making no proper uſe of it. For *better*, as the apoſtle ſays, (2. Pet. ii. 21.) *would it be never to have known the way of righteouſneſs* than, *after having known it*, to depart from it, i. e. by living a vicious life. Alſo, according to our Saviour's moſt ſolemn declarations, whatever may have been a man's relation to himſelf, even though he may have worked miracles in his name, if he be a *worker of iniquity* he will at the laſt day diſclaim all knowledge of him, and order him to depart from him.

As the improvement of the human character in virtuous principles and habits is the end of all religion, we muſt judge of the preferableneſs of *natural*, or *revealed* religion by their ſuperior tendency to effect this great end. But, indeed, ſo little of *religion* properly ſo called have men ever derived from the light of nature, and ſo little are thoſe who reject revelation really influenced by any religious principle, that

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the true ſtate of the queſtion, in fact, is whether it be better for man to have the religion that is taught in the ſcriptures, or none at all. They who reject revelation may not abſolutely, and in words reject the belief of a God, and of a providence (though we ſee in the example of the French philoſophers, and many others, that this is generally the caſe) they are not influenced by that belief. Nor can we wonder at this, when they certainly have not, in fact, any expectation of a future ſtate, which, as I ſhall ſhew, was never taught to any uſeful purpoſe but by revelation.

Religion implies the belief of the being and providence of God, and ſuch a reſpect for the will of God, as will effectually controul a man's natural inclinations and direct his conduct, reſtraining him from irregularities to which he is naturally prone, and exciting him to actions to which he is naturally averſe. But as men in general are governed either by ſtrong natural appetites, or a view to their intereſt,

tereſt, it cannot be expected that *virtue alone*, without any hope of future reward or puniſhment, can have ſuch charms for them, that they will abandon their pleaſure, their eaſe, or their advantage, for the pure love of it. Suppoſing that men might arrive at a knowledge of the will of God with reſpect to their conduct in life, they would not feel any ſufficient *obligation* to conform to it, without the great ſanction of future rewards and puniſhments. Mere authority, as that of a parent, or of a magiſtrate, is little or nothing without the power of rewarding and puniſhing. Nothing, therefore, but a firm belief in a future ſtate of retribution, can be expected to reſtrain men from giving into thoſe indulgences to which they have a ſtrong propenſity.

1. With reſpect to every article of religion, the light of nature is far from being ſufficiently clear and diſtinct, ſo as to be inferred with certainty by the moſt intelligent of men. With reſpect to what is moſt eſſential to human happineſs, the wiſeſt of men

men do not appear to have been, in fact, ſuperior to the bulk, having in a variety of reſpects, laid down the moſt erroneous rules for the conduct of men. Plain as the moſt important maxims of morality are, there is not one of them, but what the moſt enlightened not only of the ancient philoſophers, but of modern unbelievers, have controverted. What we call *conſcience*, and which we might expect to be a better guide in this reſpect, than even *reaſon*, is by no means the ſame uniform principle in all men. It is formed by various aſſociations of ideas, depending on the circumſtances of our education, ſo that things which abſolutely ſhock ſome perſons, are not felt as at all improper by others. There is, therefore, ſomething wanted ſuperior to the dictates of reaſon, or natural conſcience, and this can only be *revealed religion*, or the authority of our maker, which muſt be obeyed without reaſoning. Man will, no doubt, diſpute even about the will of God, when it is moſt clearly revealed, as they do concerning the

the moſt expreſs laws that are ever made by men, but if this be done with reſpect to the articulate voice of God, it will be done to a much greater extent, and with much more plauſibility, to the inarticulate voice of nature, which every perſon will interpret as he is previouſly inclined.

If when men are hurried on by paſſion, or ſwayed by intereſt, they will tranſgreſs ſuch poſitive and acknowledged commands, as *thou ſhalt not commit adultery*, *thou ſhalt not ſteal*, *&c.* as we ſee that, in fact, they do, it will not, however, be without reluctance, and remorſe; and therefore tranſgreſſions will be leſs frequent, and leſs flagrant, and repentance and amendment may be more reaſonably expected to follow. But where no ſuch poſitive command is acknowledged to exiſt, and the voice of nature alone is to be conſulted about the proper conduct of life, moſt men will miſtake their own inclination for the voice of nature, and conſequently ſin without reluctance or remorſe. Of this it would be eaſy to give inſtances in the cleareſt of all

all caſes, but this would take up too much of our time, and ſomething of this was mentioned in my laſt diſcourſe.

2. Still leſs would men, by the mere light of nature, have ever attained to any ſatisfactory concluſion with reſpect to the ultimate deſign of the author of nature in the formation of man. I mean the prolongation of his exiſtence beyond the grave. On this moſt intereſting of all queſtions nature is altogether ſilent. Judging from appearances, as the brutes die, ſo does man; and all his faculties and powers die with him. That at death any things eſcapes, unaffected by this cataſtrophe, is a mere arbitrary ſuppoſition, unſupported by any appearance, or probability of any kind.

That the belief which the ancient Greeks and Romans had of a future life, imperfect, and of little value, as it was, was originally derived from revelation, but exceedingly corrupted by tradition, is pretty evident from this circumſtance, that when they began to *ſpeculate* on the ſubject,

ſubject, and examine the *reaſons* they could produce for it, all ſerious belief in the doctrine ſoon vaniſhed. With the Platoniſts, who made the moſt of this doctrine, it was only a curious ſpeculation, of no real uſe in the conduct of life, ſuch as it is with Jews and Chriſtians. Indeed, the *reaſons* which the Platoniſts gave for this doctrine, and which Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates, are ſuch as could not poſſibly have any weight with thinking men. That on which he lays the greateſt ſtreſs, is the doctrine of pre-exiſtence, that the ſouls of men were originally without bodies, and afterwards confined in them as in a priſon, and that death is the breaking of this priſon. But where is the evidence of men having pre-exiſted? This doctrine of pre-exiſtence we find moſt fully eſtabliſhed in Egypt and the Eaſt, whence Plato and other Greeks derived it. With modern unbelievers it certainly has no weight.

It is well known that the firſt philoſophers among the Greeks did not pretend

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to diſcover any thing by their own reaſoning. They only taught what they had learned of others, who had received the tenets that had been tranſmitted to them from early times, and that what they taught was delivered to their pupils on their ſole *authority*, as what was not to be contradicted. This was the eſtabliſhed cuſtom of the Pythagorean ſchool. Reaſoning came into their ſchools afterwards, and with it the wildeſt theories on all ſubjects, as I ſhall ſhew in its proper place, and a total ſcepticiſm with reſpect to the doctrine of a future ſtate of retribution, as a motive to virtue.

Suppoſing that it were poſſible by the mere light of nature to arrive at the belief of a future ſtate, yet judging from preſent appearances, it could not be the future ſtate announced in the Scriptures, a ſtate in which virtue will find an ample recompence, and vice its juſt puniſhment, but only ſuch a life as *this*, and in all other reſpects reſembling the preſent; which is the belief of the North American Indians,

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and moſt other barbarous nations. If becauſe we diſlike any thing in the preſent ſyſtem, we entertain an idea that the inconvenience complained of will be removed in a future ſtate, where is the evidence that, under the ſame powers, or principles, of nature, whatever they are, things *will* be ordered in a better manner? Is it poſſible to infer from what we ſee (and we have nothing elſe by which to guide our conjectures) that thoſe evils which the author of nature has thought proper, for whatever reaſon, to introduce, or to permit, here, will not be continued there alſo? If we ſay that it is not agreeable to *juſtice* that good and bad men ſhould be treated as they are here, where is the evidence, from any preſent appearances, that the author of nature *intended* that they ſhould ever be treated otherwiſe? Left to the light of nature, we could only reaſon from what we know, and this would lead us to expect that, if there be any life after death, it will be ſimilar to the preſent. It is only from the expreſs aſſurance of the

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author of nature, communicated by revelation, that we believe the future ſtate will be better than the preſent, that in it the righteous will be fully rewarded, and the wicked puniſhed. It is evident, therefore, that when we abandon revelation, we give up all *religion* properly ſo called, all that can have any ſalutary influence on the hearts and lives of men.

3. With reſpect to *men*, there is certainly a great advantage in precepts and commands, promiſes and threatenings being delivered in *words*, proceeding as from a real perſon, it being by this means that inſtructions are delivered with the greateſt diſtinctneſs. It may indeed, be ſaid, and with truth, that nature ſpeaks to men, and that nature teaches, and nature threatens, but beſides that the information is more indiſtinctly communicated, it is in a manner leſs apt to make an impreſſion, and command reſpect. It is, therefore, of great advantage that the attention of men be directed to ſomething beyond mere nature, viz. to the author and lord

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of nature, and that he be conſidered not as an allegorical perſonage, but a real intelligent Being, capable of communicating his will in words, and ſuch ſigns as men are daily accuſtomed to, and apt to be impreſſed by.

Beſides, all men feel an unavoidable propenſity to *addreſs* themſelves to the Being on whom they depend; and without ſome mode of intercourſe with him, they would ſoon loſe ſight of him, as a child would of his father, if he never ſaw him, and had no acceſs to him. Without an idea of God different from what we could collect from the contemplation of nature, there would be no ſuch thing as *prayer*. Indeed, unbelievers in revelation ridicule the idea of prayer as unnatural and abſurd, though all nations, without exception, have had recourſe to it; which is a clear proof that it is natrual, as every thing that is univerſal muſt be.

Authority is beſt ſupported by a mixture of *affection*, but there cannot be any thing of *this* except towards a being reſembling

ſembling other beings which have been the object of an affection, and which have engaged our confidence. And in revelation, but by no means in nature, the Supreme Being appears to us in the familiar character of a parent, a perſon with whom we can have communication, who may be conceived to be always preſent with us, who encourages us to addreſs ourſelves to him, who always hears us, and ſometimes anſwers us. By this means God eaſily becomes the object of real affection, and attachment. Here we find a ſolid foundation for *love* and *fear*, which are the chief motives for men's actions. With believers in revelation, this ſometimes degenerates into an abſurd enthuſiaſm, by which the Divine Being becomes the object of a fond and improper affection.

We may ſay that it is beneath the Supreme Being, and unworthy of him, to have this familiar intercourſe with men; but it is of great importance to our virtue and happineſs; and to a being of perfect benevolence, and who knows, the frame that

that he has given us, nothing will appear beneath him that is ſo well adapted to anſwer his benevolent purpoſe reſpecting us. Nor, indeed, would the moſt abſolute prince, if he really wiſhed to appear as the father and friend of his people, think any thing beneath him that tended to promote the happineſs of his ſubjects.

It is ſaid by modern unbelievers, that the expectaion of ſuch a being as the great author of nature condeſcending to act this humble part is unreaſonable, and that miracles of all kinds, the only evidence of it, are neceſſarily incredible. I anſwer that the aſſertion betrays a great unacquaintedneſs with human nature, and the hiſtory of man. For it has been the belief of all nations, and all ages, that the higheſt beings of whom they had any idea have acted this very part. Socrates himſelf expreſſed an earneſt wiſh for a divine inſtructor. This expectation and belief is, therefore, by no means unnatural, and there muſt be ſomething in human nature that leads to it.

If

If we look to the laſt, and therefore what we may ſuppoſe to be the moſt improved ſtate of heathen philoſophy, that of the later Platoniſts, or Eclectics, to which the emperor Julian (whoſe ſuperior good ſenſe is ſo much the boaſt of modern unbelievers) attached himſelf, we ſhall find them in this very reſpect the moſt ſuperſtitious, the moſt enthuſiaſtic, and the moſt credulous of men. Far from ſuppoſing that men had no intercourſe with the ſupreme being, they expected to unite themſelves to him by contemplation, and corporeal mortification. "The piety of "Proclus, one of the moſt celebrated of "them, is highly extolled by his biogra-"pher. He ſpent whole days and nights "in repeating prayers and hymns, that "he might prepare himſelf for an imme-"diate intercourſe with the gods. He "obſerved with great ſolemnity the new "moons, and all public feſtivals, and on "theſe occaſions imagined that he con-"verſed with ſuperior beings, and was "able by his ſacrifices, prayers, and hymns,

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" to expel diſeaſes, to command rain, " to ſtop earthquakes, and to perform " other ſimilar miracles." Whether, therefore, we look to the vulgar, or the philoſophers among the ancients, we ſhall find the idea of divine communications and of miracles, to have been natural to man. Theſe philoſophers did not deny the miracles of Chriſt, but maintained that he wrought them by the ſame magical or theurgic powers, as they were termed, which they themſelves poſſeſſed. See Enfield's Hiſtory of Philoſophy, Vol. i. p. 83, 92.

4. They who give ſo decided a preference to the light of nature, the appearances of which are uniform, to that of revelation, which ſuppoſes an occaſional departure from the uſual courſe of nature, betray their ignorance of the nature of man, by whom all *uniform appearances* are apt to be diſregarded, but who never fail to be ſtruck by what is *unuſual*. Does not every human being ſee the regular riſing and ſetting of the ſun, the periodical returns

returns of ſummer and winter, ſeed time and harveſt, but how few ever think of the wiſdom or benevolence of theſe appointments? They content themſelves with obſerving *effects*, and directing their conduct by them, without ever reflecting on the *cauſe*. But wherever any thing *unuſual* happens, when comets are ſeen, or eclipſes of the ſun or moon take place, their attention is forcibly arreſted; and after reflecting on the cauſe of the extraordinary appearances, they may be induced to give ſome attention to thoſe that are conſtant. I ſhall illuſtrate this by a caſe which I have put on a former occaſion.

Let a perſon unacquainted with clocks, watches, and other machines, be introduced into a room containing many of them, all in regular motion. He ſees no maker of theſe machines, and knows nothing of their internal ſtructure; and as he ſees them all to move with perfect regularity, he may ſay, on the principles of the atheiſtical ſyſtem, that they are *automata*, or ſelf-moving machines; and ſo long

long as all theſe machines continue in regular motion, and he knows nothing of the making of them, or the winding of them up, this theory may appear plauſible.

But let us ſuppoſe that, coming into this room again and again, and, always attending to the machines, he ſhall find one of them much out of order, and that at length its motion ſhall intirely ceaſe; but that after continuing in this ſtate ſome time, he ſhall again find it in perfect order, moving as regularly as ever. Will he not then conclude that ſome perſon, whom he has not ſeen, but probably the maker of the machines, had been in the room in his abſence? The reſtoration of motion to the diſordered machine would impreſs his mind with the idea of a *maker* of them in a much more forcible manner than his obſerving the regular conſtruction, and uniform motion of them. It muſt convince him of the exiſtence of ſome perſon capable of *regulating*, and therefore probably of *making* theſe machines,

machines, whether he ſhould ever ſee this perſon or not.

Thus do miracles prove the exiſtence of a God in a ſhorter and more ſatisfactory manner than the obſervation of the uninterrupted courſe of nature. If there be a Being who can *controul* the courſe of nature, there muſt be one who originally *eſtabliſhed it*, in whatever difficulty we may ſtill be left with reſpect to his nature, and the manner of his exiſtence.

Why men ſhould be ſtruck with unuſual appearances it is not my buſineſs to explain, though it would not be difficult to do it, the fact of their *being ſo* is ſufficient to my purpoſe. And therefore a perſon acquainted with human nature, and this property of it, would not neglect to avail himſelf of it when he wiſhed to engage the attention of men, for the purpoſe of their inſtruction and improvement. Why then ſhould we think it unnatural, or improper, in the divine Being, who, as the maker of men, beſt knows what they are, and in what way to apply to them?

Let

Let no one then ſay that occaſional interpoſitions, or miraculous appearances, are an unnatural, or improper mode of inſtructing mankind, when it is in a manner neceſſary to draw their attention to a ſuperior being, as a foundation for their intercourſe with him.

4. No leſs are they miſtaken who imagine that the *evidences* of revealed religion have more of difficulty in them than thoſe of natural religion, by which we mean the arguments from nature for the being, perfections, and providence of God. On the contrary, far greater difficulties occur with reſpect to *theſe*, than with reſpect to the others, and all that can be ſaid is, that great difficulties muſt give way to greater. Far am I from ſuppoſing that the evidence for the being of a God, is not *demonſtrative*, ſince marks of deſign, with which the world abounds, neceſſarily imply a deſigning or intelligent cauſe. But notwithſtanding this, we can never fully ſatisfy ourſelves with reſpect to the objection of the atheiſt, that if the univerſe

univerſe require a cauſe, this cauſe muſt require another; and if the author of nature, or the being we call *God*, exiſt without a cauſe, ſo may the univerſe itſelf.

All that we can ſay in anſwer to this, is that, whatever difficulty we may labour under with reſpect to this ſubject, which will always be above our comprehenſion, the actual exiſtence of a viſible world, and of marks of deſign in it, cannot be denied, and therefore, whether we be able to proceed any farther or not, we *muſt* acknowledge a deſigning cauſe. Otherwiſe we might ſay that a houſe had no architect, or a child no father. If the eye of a man require no deſigning cauſe, neither would a teleſcope, which is an inſtrument of a ſimilar nature, evidently adapted to anſwer a ſimilar purpoſe. And at this ſuppoſition every mind would revolt.

More and greater difficulties occur when we proceed to the conſideration of the unity, the omnipreſence, the conſtant agency, and what is of more conſequence

ſtill, the *benevolence* of the Supreme Being, on the principles of the light of nature. So forcibly were the minds of men in the early ages, impreſſed with a view of the *evils* which abound in the world, and ſo inconſiſtent did they conceive them to be with the deſigns of a benevolent author, that they ſuppoſed there was an original *principle of evil*, independant of that of good. And they who ſuppoſed there was a multiplicity of deities (to which they were led by the extent and variety they obſerved in the works of nature) imagined ſome of them to be of a benevolent, and others of a malevolent diſpoſition. That the author of nature is one, that he is ſimply, invariably, and infinitely good, and that all the evils we ſee and experience, are calculated to promote good, are great and ſublime truths, which we derive from revelation only, though, on a ſtrict examination, they appear not to be inconſiſtent with the appearances in nature.

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On the other hand, the evidences of revelation are level to every capacity. That it is the author of nature who interpoſes muſt be evident from every interuption of the uſual courſe of it. For no other than he who eſtabliſhed the laws of nature can controul them; and though there may be ſome difficulty in diſtinguiſhing ſome preternatural appearances from ſuch as are merely unuſual, this cannot be the caſe with reſpect to numberleſs others. If it was a fact that the Iſraelites walked through the Red Sea, and the river Jordan, if all the firſt-born of the Egyptians, and the firſt-born only, of man and beaſt, died in one night, and that announced before-hand; if an articulate voice was actually heard to pronounce the ten commandments from mount Sinai, ſo as to be heard by a million of people, there could be no doubt of a divine interpoſition in any of the caſes. And the ſame may be ſaid of numberleſs other facts in the ſcripture hiſtory. If the *facts* be aſcertained, there can be no doubt concerning their *cauſe*.

Now,

Now, all facts may be aſcertained by ſufficient teſtimony, or that of a competent number of credible witneſſes, i. e. of perſons who were in circumſtances not to be impoſed upon themſelves, and who had no apparent motive to impoſe upon others. This is fully equal to the evidence of a man's own ſenſes. Nay, there are many perſons who would diſtruſt their own eyes and ears rather than thoſe of other perſons, who they thought were better judges than themſelves.

Though ſingle perſons may be impoſed upon in a variety of ways, or may take it into their heads, for reaſons which it is not in the power of any man to inveſtigate, to impoſe upon others, this can never be ſaid to be the caſe with reſpect to thouſands who believe, or atteſt, things evidently contrary to their intereſt, and previous inclinations. That great numbers of perſons, and others in ſucceſſion to them, all of whom had ſufficient opportunity to inveſtigate any particular fact, which required no other evidence than

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that of the ſenſes, and who were intereſted in the inveſtigation, their fortunes or their lives depending upon it, ſhould perſiſt in their atteſtation of it, would be a greater miracle, more contrary to what we know of human nature, than any fact contained in the ſcripture hiſtory.

As to the evidence of a future ſtate, what are all the arguments derived from the light of nature compared to that which is furniſhed by the goſpel, which is therefore juſtly ſaid (2 Tim. i. 10.) to *bring life and immortality to light?* There we ſee a perſon commiſſioned by God, teaching the doctrine with the greateſt plainneſs and emphaſis, enforcing it by miracles, among which was the raiſing of ſeveral perſons from a ſtate of death to life, and, what was infinitely more, ſubmitting to die himſelf in the moſt public and indiſputable manner, and riſing to life again at a fixed time. Had mankind in general been aſked what evidence would ſatisfy them, they could not have demanded more.

Whatever

Whether therefore, we conſider the precepts of religion, i. e. the rules of a virtuous aud happy life, the authority requiſite to enforce the obſervance of them, the motives by which they are enforced, or the evidence of their truth, revealed religion has unſpeakably the advantage of natural; and therefore ſo far is the ſcheme of revelation from being improbable *a priori*, that it muſt appear ſuch as a wiſe and good Being, who was acquainted with human nature, and wiſhed to engage the attention of men, and impreſs their minds with ſentiments of reverence of himſelf, and reſpect for ſuch laws as were calculated to promote their greateſt happineſs, would adopt in preference to any other; being the beſt adapted to gain his end. It was of the greateſt importance to mankind to be made acquainted with thoſe moral principles and rules of conduct on which their happineſs depended, and which they would never have diſcovered of themſelves, to have their attention drawn to them in the moſt

moſt forcible manner, and to have the moſt ſatisfactory evidence of their truth; and this is what we find in revelation, and in revelation only. It is therefore as the apoſtle juſtly calls it (1 Cor. i. 24) *the wiſdom and the power of God*, though objected to, and ridiculed, by light and ſuperficial men.

DISCOURSE III.

A View of Heathen Worſhip.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, who hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs. Becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſt in them, for God hath ſhewed it unto them. For the inviſible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead, ſo that they are without excuſe. Becauſe that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their fooliſh heart was darkened. Profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and fourfooted beaſts, and creeping things. Wherefore alſo God gave them up to uncleanneſs, through the luſts of their own hearts, to diſhonour their own bodies between themſelves, who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worſhipped and ſerved the creature more than the Creator, who is bleſſed for ever. For this cauſe God gave them up to vile affections.

ROMANS, i. 18---26.

IN order to give you a juſt idea of the real value of revelation, it is neceſſary that I lay before you the ſtate of things with reſpect to *religion* in the heathen world,

world, eſpecially in the early ages of mankind, about the time of Moſes; that when I come to give you a view of his inſtitutions, the difference may be the more ſtriking. Very few, I am perſuaded, of the modern unbelievers have a juſt knowledge of this ſubject. If they had, it would, I hope, be impoſſible for them to treat the religion of the Hebrews with ſo much contempt. Not only the extreme ignorance, but the great depravity, of mankind in a ſtate of heatheniſm, would not be credible at this day, if there did not exiſt a ſuperfluity of the moſt authentic documents of it, ſo that the facts cannot be denied without the extreme of effrontery. This, however, we find in Voltaire, who ſays that "the religion of the "heathens conſiſted in nothing but *mora-* "*lity*, and feſtivals; morality" which he ſays "is common to all men, and *feſtivals* "which were no more than times of re- "joicing, and could not be of prejudice to "mankind." The particulars which I ſhall be obliged to mention, and which could not

be unknown to this writer, though they are to many others, will ſhew how ſhamefully the truth is diſguiſed in this repreſentation. The religion of the heathens had nothing to do with morality, and their public feſtivals were almoſt without exception, ſcenes of the greateſt riot and debauchery. Believing their gods to be cruel or ſenſual, there is no vice how deteſtable and unnatural ſoever, that did not find a place in the moſt ſolemn acts of their worſhip.

It is not neceſſary for me to give any account of the manner in which mankind fell into this deplorable ſtate of depravity it being ſufficient to ſhew that ſuch *was* their ſtate, and that it was evident, from the experience of ages, in which men made the moſt of their powers of reaſon, that they were not able to relieve themſelves. *Why* the Supreme Being permitted the riſe and progreſs of this ſpecies of evil, may be as inſcrutable to us, as the permiſſion of any other evil, natural or moral, none of which it muſt be acknowledged, could have taken place without his

his knowledge and permiſſion, and all of which, and this among the reſt, we have reaſon to believe will lead to good, and hereafter appear to have done ſo. In the mean time it is well worth our while to contemplate the magnitude of the evil, and the goodneſs of God in the cure of it, in what, no doubt, was the proper time, and in the moſt proper and effectual manner.

That the great principles of religion, concerning the being and providence of God, and a future ſtate of exiſtence, were communicated by God to the firſt parents of mankind, is probable from ſeveral circumſtances. Obſcure traces of this knowledge are found in all antient nations, and the farther we go back into antiquity, the purer we find their religion to be. But in proceſs of time it became more and more corrupted, till, inſtead of coming in aid of virtue, it was itſelf, a great ſource of the corruption of morals, as the progreſs is well deſcribed in my text.

The

The world ever bore ſufficient marks of its being the production of an omnipotent and good Being, a lover of virtue, and a hater of vice; but men, contemplating, as we may ſuppoſe, the immenſe variety, and ſeeming contrariety, of the works of creation, could not believe that the whole was under the direction of *one being:* And being left to their own imaginations, and judging of other intelligent beings by what they obſerved in themſelves, and others, they concluded that there muſt be a *multiplicity of beings*, concerned in the government of the world, and the direction of human affairs, ſome well and others ill diſpoſed towards them. For it required more knowledge and comprehenſion of mind than they had attained, to perceive that all the evils with which the world abounds were calculated to promote good. They thought they ſaw in them the effects of malice, and ill will, at leaſt of caprice, and their conduct naturally correſponded to their ideas.

The

The mind of man is never ſatisfied without looking for the *cauſes* of events, eſpecially thoſe that take place only occaſionally, and to appearance, irregularly, and ſtill more if they be favourable or unfavourable to themſelves, becauſe they hope by this means to be able to avoid the one, and ſecure the other. And not being able to diſcover the true cauſes, they muſt, of courſe, acquieſce in what they *imagine* to be the true cauſes. It appears from all hiſtory that, in the moſt early ages, mankind in general aſcribed every thing that affected them to the influences of the heavenly bodies, the ſun, moon, ſtars, and planets, and to an intelligent principle which they ſuppoſed to reſide in them. For heat and cold, ſtorms and rain, often coming unexpectedly, they naturally enough imagined that they did not come without deſign, and that, if theſe heavenly agents had been ſo diſpoſed, their influences would have been always favourable. To theſe objects therefore, they, of courſe, directed all their regards, and their worſhip.

They

They alſo came to ſuppoſe that there was an intelligent principle in the earth, and in the ſeveral parts of it, as the air, the ſea, the rivers, mountains, foreſts, &c. ſo that they ſoon became poſſeſſed of a great multiplicity of objects of worſhip, whoſe favour they thought it of importance to gain, and whoſe diſpleaſure they wiſhed to deprecate.

Having got the idea of different ſuperior intelligences, whether ſubordinate to the ſupreme Being or not, they ſoon loſt ſight of the ſupreme Being himſelf, and gave their whole attention to thoſe inferior beings, whom they ſuppoſed to be the immediate authors of the good and evil that befel them. This was on the ſame natural principle that tenants look to the ſteward, with whom they tranſact all their buſineſs, and not to the proprietor of the land, with whom they have nothing to do.

We have this farther evidence from fact, that this practice was natural. When Chriſtians got the idea of Jeſus Chriſt,

Chriſt, of ſaints and angels being proper objects of worſhip, they generally fell into the habit of looking no higher, neglecting the worſhip of God; and had it not been for the prayers addreſſed to him in the ſcriptures and in the antient liturgies, he would, I doubt not, have been as much overlooked and forgotten, as if no ſuch being had exiſted.

But on whatever principle this took place, the fact cannot be denied, and the number of gods kept increaſing, inſtead of diminiſhing by time and reflection. Orpheus reckoned only as many gods as there were days in the year, but in the time of Heſiod, the Greeks had no leſs than thirty thouſand divinities. The Romans in the time of Varro had three hundred Jupiters, that is the ſame God was worſhipped under ſo many different titles, under which he was ſuppoſed to poſſeſs different powers, and ſome have reckoned no leſs than two hundred and eighty thouſand gods.

The

The Egyptians, from whom the Greeks originally received their religion, imagined that particular animals were the favourites of particular deities, and communicated their powers to them. At leaſt, they conſidered their ſeveral qualities as ſymbols of divine power, and at length paid a proper worſhip to them. Plutarch expreſsly ſays, that "the greater part of the Egyptians "worſhipped the animals themſelves," which he ſaid "led ſome to the moſt ex- "travagant ſuperſtition, and precipitated "others into atheiſm." Cotta, in Cicero, ſays that "though there have been many "inſtances of temples plundered, and the "images of the gods carried away, by "the Romans, it had never been heard "that a crocodile, an ibis, or a cat, had "been ill treated by the Egyptians," ſo far did they carry their ſuperſtitious reſpect for them.

Another ſource of the multiplication of deities was an idea that particular ſuperior beings preſided over particular circumſtances

cumſtances relating to men, and their affairs, ſo that they had gods correſponding to many abſtract ideas. Thus the Romans had temples and altars dedicated to the *fever*, and ill *fortune*, and the Athenians to *contumely* and *impudence*. At length, after deifying all the parts of nature, and many of the qualities and properties of things, they deified particular *men*, and worſhipped them after their death. Nay the Romans, in the time of the emperors, carried their adulation ſo far as to pay divine honours to ſome of them, and thoſe the very worſt of them, while they were alive.

The heavenly bodies being ſometimes inviſible, the heathens had recourſe to ſome ſymbols of their power, or ſome viſible object, to which they imagined their powers were in ſome way or other attached, and to which they could always have recourſe. Theſe were at firſt *pillars*, or only large ſtones, conſecrated in certain poſitions of thoſe heavenly bodies, which they wanted to repreſent. Refining upon this, they afterwards made uſe of the forms of men and

and animals for that purpoſe. The forms of ſome of their deities being altogether unknown, they made uſe of ſuch figures as they conceived to be proper ſymbols of their powers. The idols of the Egyptians had the heads of particular animals, as that of a dog, on the body, or part of the body of a man. At Rome the god Janus had two faces, and the idols of Indoſtan have a great number of arms, &c. Hence Varro, ſpeaking of theſe images ſays, that "if they had life, and any perſon ſhould "meet them unexpectedly, they would "paſs for monſters." He alſo cenſures the cruel and laſcivious rites that were introduced into the worſhip of ſeveral of their gods, eſpecially of Cybele; yet he ſays that "a wiſe man will obſerve all "theſe things, not as acceptable to the "gods, but as commanded by the laws," and ſpeaking of the "ignoble rabble" as he calls them "of the gods," which, he ſays, "the ſuperſtition of ages has heaped "together," he adds, "we ſo adore "them, as to remember that this wor-

ſhip

" ſhip is rather matter of cuſtom, than " founded on nature and truth." So far were the heathen philoſophers, who were ſenſible of the abſurdity and pernicious tendency of this worſhip, from being diſpoſed to reform it. It was a maxim with them, as with the generality of modern unbelievers, to think with the wiſe, and act with the vulgar. But had Chriſt and his apoſtles acted on this princple, we ſhould now have been worſhipping Thor and Woden, and imbruing their altars with human blood.

The moſt horrid of all the rites of the heathen religion was that of *human ſacrifices*, which, however, were univerſal in ancient times, and eſpecially among the Canaanites, and in the countries that bordered upon Paleſtine, as, indeed, the hiſtory of the Carthaginians, who were deſcended from the Tyrians, abundantly proves.

We ſhall not much wonder at the introduction of this rite, ſhocking as it is to humanity, when we conſider the deſtruction of life, and other evils occaſionally produced

produced by natural cauſes, as by heat, drought, lightning, earthquakes, &c. Theſe the heathens, of courſe, aſcribed to the agency of their gods. They would, therefore, imagine that they were ſometimes very angry, and that great ſacrifices were neceſſary to appeaſe them. Apprehenſive, then, of greater evils, they willingly ſubjected themſelves to thoſe that were leſs.

In general, the heathens thought the ſacrifice of ſlaves and captives would ſatisfy the blood thirſty appetites of their gods; but on particular occaſions, fearful that this would not be deemed ſufficient, they ſacrificed the children of the moſt diſtinguiſhed perſons in the ſtate, as thoſe of their kings themſelves. The Carthaginians, after ſome great diſaſter in war, ſacrificed at one time three hundred young men of the firſt families in their commonwealth. In this the Iſraelites, during their apoſtacy from their own religion, imitated their heathen neighbours as we read, Pſalm cvi. 37. *They ſacrificed their ſons and their daughters*

daughters to demons, and ſhed innocent blood, even the blood of their ſons and daughters, whom they ſacrificed to the idols of Canaan. Jer. vii. 31. *They built the high places of Tophet which is in the valley of the ſon of Hinnom, to burn their ſons and their daughters in the fire. They built alſo the high places of Baal, to burn their ſons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal.* This place was called *Tophet*, from a Hebrew word which ſignifies a drum, or ſiſtrum, inſtruments which made a loud noiſe, which the prieſts made uſe of to drown the cries of the victims, as it was the cuſtom to burn them alive.

By Baal was meant the ſun, the principal object of worſhip in all antient nations; and as the heat of the ſun is ſometimes very deſtructive, it is no wonder that they ſuppoſed him to be actuated by the paſſion of anger. Lord Herbert obſerves that victims of leſs dignity were deemed ſufficient for the inferior deities, but that to their higheſt god, the ſun, human ſacrifices, as the moſt valuable, were to be offered.

Human

Human ſacrifices appear to have been univerſal in antient times. They were in uſe among the Egyptians till the reign of Amaſis. They were never ſo common among the Greeks or Romans; yet with them they were in uſe on extraordinary occaſions. Porphyry ſays that the Greeks were wont to ſacrifice men when they went to war. Clemens Alexandrinus ſays that both Erectheus king of Athens, and Marius the Roman general, ſacrificed their own daughters. Plutarch, in his life of Themiſtocles, relates that three beautiful Perſian women, richly habited and adorned, were, by the advice of the prophet Euphrantides, offered as ſacrifices to Bacchus Omeſtes, as a vow for victory at the commencement of the Perſian war; and though Themiſtocles was ſhocked at the inhumanity of it, the people with one voice, invoking Bacchus, and bringing the victims to the altar, compelled him to perform the ſacrifice.

The ſame hiſtorian ſays that the Romans, in the beginning of a war with the Gauls,

Gauls, and in obedience to an oracle in the Sybilline books, buried alive a Gauliſh man and a Gauliſh woman, and alſo a Greek man and a Greek woman, in the ox market by way of ſacrifice. Livy ſays that they repeated this ſacrifice at the beginning of the ſecond Punic war.

Human ſacrifices were offered at Rome, ſays Porphyry, till the reign of Adrian, who ordered them to be aboliſhed in moſt places. This writer, who lived in the time of Diocletian, mentions it as a thing well known, that in the city of Rome itſelf a man was wont to be ſacrificed at the feaſt of Jupiter Latiaris. Lactantius, who wrote a little after this, ſays that the ſame was practiſed in his time. Human ſacrifices were ſo numerous among the Gauls and Britons, that the Romans forbad the public exerciſe of their religion. According to Cæſar (De Bello Gallico, lib. 6. § 15) they ſometimes made images of an immenſe ſize, conſtructed of wicker work, which they filled with men, and then burned them alive.

In

In later times we find human ſacrifices as numerous among the Mexicans and Peruvians, who, of all the inhabitants of America, had arrived at the greateſt degree of civilization, as in any of the antient nations. The moſt authentic record ſays that the Mexicans ſacrificed annually twenty thouſand men, and at the dedication of their great temple, not leſs than ſixty or ſeventy thouſand. If any perſon will only read with attention the hiſtory of this country by Clavigero, he will be convinced that ſuch was the rooted attachment of that people to their religion in general, and this horrid rite in particular, that nothing but ſuch a conqueſt of them as that by the Spaniards, would ever have put an end to that cuſtom. His account of the ſtate of facts will abundantly juſtify the conduct of divine providence in the utter extirmination of the inhabitants of Canaan. It was for the good of mankind that ſuch nations ſhould be extirpated from the face of the earth.

If

If any perſons will ſay that the author of nature could not give a commiſſion, which they think to have been ſo cruel and unjuſt, let them ſay whether the author of nature does not continually do things which they themſelves muſt ſay are more cruel and unjuſt; as the promiſcuous deſtruction of perſons of all ages and characters by peſtilence and famine, by hurricanes and earthquakes, as alſo by diſeaſes and death, which are univerſal. Did not the author of nature clearly foreſee theſe calamities, and therefore intend that they ſhould take place? And where is the difference, in a moral view, between doing any thing by laws of his appointment, or by a ſpecial commiſſion. The thing to be objected to is the ultimate event, not the means by which it was effected. In fact, they who make this objection, and others of a ſimilar nature, firſt form to themſelves an idea of the author of nature from their own imagination, and not from the obſervation of his works, which is the only method of forming a juſt idea

idea of any character, and then pronounce that such and such things as they wish to have been otherwise are incompatible with his character. Besides, the firmest believer in the divine benevolence (and justice, strictly considered, is only a modification and branch of benevolence) will say that any kind or degree of evil that may, directly or indirectly, be productive of a greater good, is compatible with it, and of this ultimate tendency of things God himself, and not man, is the judge. This conduct, however, is not to be imitated by man, on account of the imperfection of our knowledge. We must not *do evil that good may come*, though this is constantly done by the Divine Being, because we cannot tell whether the evil *will* be productive of good, whereas, he always knows the end from the very beginning, and therefore cannot be mistaken with respect to the final result.

Besides the horrid custom of human sacrifices, which were thought to be necessary to appease the wrath of some of the

the heathen deities, they had other rites, which, though they did not terminate in death, were extremely painful. The prieſts of Baal, as we read, 1 Kings xviii. 28. *cut and ſlaſhed themſelves with knives and lancets till the blood guſhed out*, when they were deſirous of getting a favourable anſwer from him. The ſame, according to Herodotus, was practiſed in the worſhip of Iſis, an Egyptian deity, and of Bellona among the Romans. Alſo in the feſtivals of Cybele, called *the mother of the gods*, the prieſts, who were caſtrated, made hideous noiſes and howlings, and cut themſelves till the blood guſhed out. The worſhip of this goddeſs was introduced from the Eaſt to Rome. At a feſtival in Sparta boys were whipped with ſo much ſeverity, on an altar of Diana (the prieſteſs attending to ſee that it was done in a proper manner) that they often died in conſequence of it. When this was the caſe, and the boys had borne the torture with ſufficient fortitude, they had the honour of a public funeral, as having died in the ſervice of their

their country. This cuſtom was inſtituted by Lycurgus, the great Spartan lawgiver, in exchange for the ſacrifice of a man every year at the ſame altar, the oracle having only declared that the altar of that goddeſs muſt be ſprinkled with human blood. There was alſo an altar of Bacchus in Arcadia, on which many young women were beaten with rods till they died.

The rites of heathen religions now or lately exiſting, are as cruel as thoſe of any of the antients. In Indoſtan it is frequent, and deemed particularly meritorious, for widows to be burned alive with the bodies of their huſbands, and their Faquirs voluntarily undergo ſuch tortures as it is painful to read of. They will often continue ſo long in the moſt conſtrained poſtures, that their limbs are incapable of any motion; ſo that they remain ſo until they die, their wants ſupplied, and their prayers requeſted, by great numbers of perſons. Sometimes, having ſtrong iron hooks, thruſt through the ſkin of their backs, they get themſelves to be drawn up,

up, and whirled round in the air, with the greateſt violence, by means of a machine conſtructed for the purpoſe. The Mexicans, accuſtomed to the bloody ſacrifice of their priſoners, " failed not," ſays Clavigero, " to ſhed abundance of their " own blood. It makes one ſhudder to " read of the auſterities which on ſome " occaſions they exerciſed on themſelves, " either as an atonement for their ſins, or " a preparation for their more ſolemn " feſtivals. They mangled their fleſh as " if they had been inſenſible to pain, and " let out their blood in the greateſt pro- " fuſion. This was practiſed every day " by ſome of their prieſts. They pierced " themſelves with the ſharp ſpines of aloes, " and thruſt them through ſeveral parts " of their bodies, making the holes larger " on every repetition of the operation. " They had alſo ſevere watchings and " faſtings in their religious rites."

At the faſt of the Tlaſcalans, which laſted one hundred and ſixty days " the " chief prieſt, attended by about two

" hundred

" hundred perſons aſcended a high moun-
" tain, and when they deſcended, they had
" a number of little knives, and a great
" quantity of ſmall rods delivered to them.
" The firſt day they bored holes through
" their tongues, through which they drew
" the rods, and notwithſtanding the ex-
" ceſſive pain, and loſs of blood occaſion-
" ed by it, they were obliged to ſing
" aloud hymns to their gods. This cruel
" operation was repeated every twenty
" days. When eighty days of this faſt
" of the prieſts was elapſed, a general
" faſt of the people, from which the
" heads of the republic were not exempt-
" ed, began, and was continued an equal-
" ly long time."

Inconſiſtent as it may ſeem to have been with this auſterity, other rites of the antient heathen religions, and thoſe which occurred the moſt frequently, encouraged, and indeed required, the extreme of ſenſual indulgence; and ſometimes that of the moſt unnatural kind. It is not eaſy to ſay by what particular train of thinking they

they were led to conclude that ſuch practiſes as theſe could be pleaſing to the gods, but ſome of thoſe deities that were to be appeaſed by human ſacrifices were ſuppoſed to be no leſs pleaſed to ſee their worſhippers indulge themſelves in whatever could gratify their appetites; and their groves, and the temples themſelves, were ſcenes of open proſtitution.

It is well known that, in general, the heathens aſcribed to their gods the paſſions and actions of men, and too many of the oriental princes, and thoſe the moſt celebrated for their warlike and other exploits, gave into the extreme of both cruelty and luſt. It is poſſible, however, that the indecent ſymbols of their worſhip, which might be originally deſigned to repreſent what is, no doubt, the moſt remarkable circumſtance in the conſtitution of nature, viz. its *reproductive power*, or that of generation, might lead to thoſe acts of lewdneſs with which the heathen worſhip abounded. And, incredible as it may appear to us, figures which cannot be named

named with decency, were expoſed and carried about in theſe ſacred proceſſions, hymns were ſung to them, and religious worſhip paid to them. This was done by the Egyptians, and moſt other antient nations, eſpecially the Greeks, who borrowed the cuſtom from them*.

To recite the particulars of the indecencies of the heathen worſhip would be diſguſting, and the account could hardly be given in language proper for a public aſſembly; but as ſomething of this kind is become neceſſary, in order to give a juſt idea of the ſtate of *facts* which have been ſtrongly diſguiſed by unbelievers, and to ſhew the great ſuperiority of revealed religion to that which almoſt all mankind naturally fell into, I muſt, be excuſed if, for the ſake of thoſe who may have

* Lucian, a heathen writer, ſays that, in the portico of the temple at Hierapolis, which ſtood on an hill, there was a tower three hundred cubits high, built in that indecent form, to the top of which a man aſcended twice a year, where he continued ſeven days, that he might with more advantage converſe with the gods above. In the worſhip of the people of Indoſtan, figures even more ſhocking to modeſty than thoſe of the antient weſtern nations are now made uſe of.

been

been miſled by ſuch writers as Voltaire and others, (who have ſmoothed over the enormities of the heathan worſhip) recite as many particulars as may be neceſſary to give you an idea of the general character of the ſyſtem, which they repreſent as perfectly innocent, and not at all unfavourable to purity of morals, their feſtivals, as Voltaire ſays, being only ſeaſons of rejoicing, which could not be prejudicial to mankind. This would be true if their feſtivals had been nothing more than ſeaſons of rejoicing. But judge for yourſelves, whether they were not ſomething more.

That lewdneſs was a part of the antient heathen worſhip, is evident from the account that Moſes gives of that of Baal Peor, to which the Iſraelites were inticed by the Moabites and Midianites. For during that feſtival, Phinehas aſſerted the honour of his religion by killing a man and a woman in the very act of fornication; which, from the narrative, appears to have been committed without any concealment. For we read, Numb. xxv. 6. *And behold*

behold one of the children of Iſrael came, and brought unto his brethren a Midianitiſh woman, in the ſight of Moſes, and in the ſight of all the congregation of the children of Iſrael, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation; and when Phinehas the ſon of Eleazar the ſon of Aaron the prieſt ſaw it, he aroſe up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand, and he went after the man of Iſrael into the tent, and thruſt both of them through, the man of Iſrael and the woman, through her belly. Now the name of the Iſraelite who was ſlain was Zimri the ſon of Salu, a prince of the chief houſe among the Simeonites, and the name of the Midianitiſh woman that was ſlain was Cozbi the daughter of Zur, who was head over a people, and of a chief houſe in Midian.

This worſhip of Baal-Peor, if we may credit ſeveral antient writers, conſiſted in ſuch obſcene practices, or poſtures at leaſt, as are not fit to be mentioned; ſo that it is not eaſy to ſay whether they were more ridiculous, or impure. Hoſea ſays of this worſhip, ch. xi. 10. *They went unto Baal-Peor,*

Peor, and ſeparated themſelves unto their ſhame; and their abominations were according as they loved, or, as the Biſhop of Waterford renders it, and *became abominable as the objects of their love,* or worſhip.

The farther we go back into antiquity or ſo much nearer to the time of Moſes, the more undiſguiſed were theſe ſhameful practices. It appears from Herodotus, the oldeſt Greek hiſtorian, that the temples of the heathen gods had been univerſally places of proſtitution. For he ſays the Egyptians were the firſt who forbad it in their temples. He ſays that all other nations, except the Greeks (who borrowed much of their religion from the Egyptians) ſcrupled not to perform thoſe actions in the temples. Nor did the Greeks wholly abſtain from them. For when Antiochus Epiphanes converted the temple at Jeruſalem, into a temple of Jupiter Olympius, we read, 2 Mac. vi. 4. *The temple was filled with riot and revelling by the Gentiles, who dallied with harlots, and had to do with women, within the circuit of the holy places.* Julius

Julius Firmicus ſays that, after the ſeaſon of *mourning*, with which the principal feſtival of the oriental nations commenced, the reſt of the time was ſpent with every expreſſion of mirth and jollity, to which they added the moſt abominable debauchery, adultery, and inceſt. Theſe were conſtantly practiſed in their groves and temples*.

Surely, then, we may ſay, with the apoſtle in my text, that, as a puniſhment for men's apoſtacy from his worſhip, *God gave up the heathen world to vile affections*; and that there was infinite wiſdom and goodneſs in the Jewiſh and Chriſtian diſpenſations, in which we are taught a mode of worſhip worthy of a pure and holy God, a religion the great object of which is the pureſt morality, and in which all the abominations of the heathen worſhip are treated with juſt abhorrence. For our unſpeakable happineſs in being favour-

* "In what temple," ſays Juvenal, a Roman heathen poet, "are not women debauched?" *Quo non proſtat femina templo.* SAT. ix. 24.

ed

ed with theſe revelations, we cannot be too thankful. But I muſt defer the farther conſideration of theſe, and other enormities of the heathen worſhip, with which the generality of chriſtians are little acquainted, but which you muſt be ſenſible, it is highly uſeful for them to know, though diſguſting to contemplate, to another diſcourſe, with which I ſhall conclude this part of my ſubject.

DISCOURSE IV.

A View of Heathen Worſhip.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, who hold the truth in unrighteouſneſs. Becauſe that which may be known of God is manifeſt in them, for God hath ſhewed it unto them. For the inviſible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead, ſo that they are without excuſe. Becauſe that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their fooliſh heart was darkened. Profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and fourfooted beaſts, and creeping things. Wherefore alſo God gave them up to uncleanneſs, through the luſts of their own hearts, to diſhonour their own bodies between themſelves, who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worſhipped and ſerved the creature more than the Creator, who is bleſſed for ever. For this cauſe God gave them up to vile affections.

ROMANS, i. 18---26.

THE moſt plauſible objections made to the ſyſtem of revelation, and thoſe by which perſons who have no knowledge of antiquity are moſt liable to be impreſſed, are

are thoſe which relate to the Jewiſh religion, and the books of the Old Teſtament, with which the generality of Chriſtians are too little acquainted. Voltaire, and other unbelievers, are more particularly fond of repreſenting the inſtitutions of Moſes as unreaſonably intolerant, with reſpect to the heathens who, they ſay, only differed from the Hebrews in religious opinions. It therefore behoves thoſe who undertake the defence of revealed religion to ſhew, what it is very eaſy to do, that antient heatheniſm was by no means a mere ſyſtem of ſpeculative opinions, and innocent practices; but that, beſides being abſurd in the extreme, it really promoted the moſt deſtructive and the moſt execrable vices, and that the religion of the Hebrews was free from every tendency of the kind, and infinitely ſuperior to it in every other reſpect.

In my laſt diſcourſe I gave you an idea of ſome of the enormities of the heathen religion, ſuch as, though well known to the learned, are not ſo to the generality of Chriſtians,

Chriſtians, and yet without this knowledge it is impoſſible that they can have a juſt idea of the value of their own religion, or a right underſtanding of the ſcriptures, eſpecially thoſe of the Old Teſtament, in which there are perpetual alluſions to the principles and rites of the heathen worſhip. I particularly mentioned the multiplicity of the heathen deities, the vile characters of many of them, the horrid rite of human ſacrifices, the painful auſterities to which their religion ſubjected them, and the open proſtitution which was encouraged by it, and practiſed in their very temples; and in ſupport of my repreſentations, I recited a variety of facts, from the authority of the ſcriptures, and other antient writings. Had I contented myſelf with exclaiming in general terms only againſt the religion of the heathens, ſaying of it, as Voltaire does of the religion of the Jews, that it was an *execrable ſuperſtition*, without reciting any of the circumſtances which ſhew it to have been ſuch, all that you could have inferred would have been, that

I was

was desirous of impressing your minds with an abhorrence of that religion, but then you would have had no knowledge of the reasons why it deserved that abhorrence, and therefore might have paid no regard to my unsupported representation.

My last discourse concluded with observing that a most prominent feature in the religion of the antient heathens, was the encouragement it gave to lewdness, and this continued with increase, when, in the progress of civilization, the cruel rite of human sacrifices, and their painful austerities, became less frequent. For this reason the apostle Paul, in the chapter which contains my text, and in other parts of his epistles, particularly dwells upon it.

On this subject I shall only mention one more circumstance, which is several times mentioned, or alluded to, in the scriptures. It is that a considerable revenue arose to many of the heathen temples, as is now the case in Indostan, from the prostitution that was encouraged

in them, or in places provided for that abominable purpoſe adjoining to them. The Divine Being, alluding to this practice of the heathens, ſays, by Moſes, Deut. xxiii. 18. *Thou ſhalt not bring the hire of a harlot into the houſe of the Lord thy God. There ſhall be no harlot of the daughters of Iſrael, nor a Sodomite of the ſons of Iſrael.* For, incredible as it may appear to us, who have had the happineſs of being educated in the principles of the pureſt of all religions, even unnatural pollution was allowed, and encouraged, in the religion of the antient heathens. For this we have the clear evidence of the ſcriptures, as well as of many antient writers. Concerning the pious king Joſiah, we read, 2 Kings, xxiii. 7. that *he brake down the houſes of the Sodomites that were by the houſe of the Lord, where the woman wove hangings for the grove*, or rather for *Aſteroth*, or *Aſtarte*, a famous Syrian goddeſs*.

Beſides

* Herodotus informs us that at Babylon, a city the moſt devoted to the worſhip of idols of all the nations of antiquity every woman was obliged once in her life to proſtitute herſelf

In the time of Conſtantine, and no doubt from times of the moſt remote antiquity, the Egyptians had religious rites in which ſodomy was practiſed, and they imagined that the riſe of the Nile depended on the obſervance of them. Theſe this Chriſtian emperor ordered to be diſcontinued; and whereas the ſuperſtitious heathens

ſelf to ſome ſtranger in the temple of Venus. Becauſe the moſt wealthy diſdained to expoſe themſelves in public, among the reſt, they went in covered chariots to the gates of the temple, with a numerous train of ſervants attending at a diſtance But the far greater part went into the temple itſelf, and ſat down covered with garlands. The galleries in which they ſat were in a ſtraight line, and open on every ſide, that all ſtrangers might have free paſſage to chuſe ſuch as they liked beſt. The beautiful women, he ſays, were ſoon diſmiſſed; but the deformed were ſometimes obliged to wait three or four days before they could ſatisfy the law. The perſon who made choice of any of them made her a preſent, which was ſacred to the deity, and could not be refuſed, though ever ſo ſmall.

The ſame hiſtorian ſays that the women of Cyprus had a cuſtom not unlike this of the Babylonians. There was the like in the temple of Venus at Sicca in Africa, at Corinth, and at Comana in Cappadocia. In the temple of Venus at Aphaca, on mount Libanus, there was a kind of academy of lewdneſs, open to all debauched perſons, where the moſt beaſtly crimes were committed in the temple, as a privileged place, exempt from all law and government. The *ludi Florales* at Rome were celebrated by a company of proſtitutes, who

thens had imagined that the conſequence of this ſuppreſſion would be that the river would not riſe as uſual, the Chriſtians ſaid it roſe higher than before.

Sodomy, ſays Julius Firmicus, who wrote in the time of the ſons of Conſtantine, was then practiſed in the temple of Juno. He adds that they were ſo far from being aſhamed of it, that they gloried in it. And it appears from various writers, that the gains of this abominable kind of proſtitution were a ſource of revenue to the heathen temples, as well as thoſe of the women who belonged to them. And yet of this religion Voltaire ſays that "it

who ran up and down naked, uſing the moſt laſcivious poſtures. The temple of Venus at Corinth maintained above a thouſand proſtitutes, ſacred to her ſervice, and what they got was given to the goddeſs. The ſame is the caſe at this day with reſpect to many of the temples in Indoſtan. Tavernier ſays there is a Pagod near Cambaye, where women proſtitute themſelves, and Marco Polo ſays that the like cuſtom prevailed at Camul; and that when it was forbidden by the Mahometan prince Mongou Khan, and the order had been obeyed three years, the people ſent deputies to get it repealed, as they ſaid that their fields had not been ſo fruitful as they had been before.

"could

" could not be of any prejudice to man-
" kind."*

Beſides the rites which were performed in public, and at which all perſons were permitted, and often required, to be preſent, there were in the antient heathen religions, rites of a private nature, to which none were admitted but under an oath of ſecrecy, the violation of which was deemed to be the greateſt act of impiety. Some have ſuppoſed that the deſign of theſe *myſteries*, as thoſe rites were called,

* How the rites of the goddeſs Cybele operated as an incentive to lewdneſs may be ſeen in Juvenal, Sat. vi. 313. &c.

That theſe practices thus ſanctioned by religion, had a fatal influence on the public opinion and the public morals, is evident from the writings of the heathens, eſpecially thoſe of the poets, which abound with the moſt diſguſting obſcenities. One of the moſt admired eclogues of Virgil, who is eſteemed the chaſteſt of the Roman poets, celebrates the love of a man to a boy, and the only remaining, and much admired poem, of the Greek poeteſs Sappho, deſcribes that of a woman to a woman, which is an abundant confirmation of what to us appears moſt incredible in the apoſtle Paul's repreſentation of the depravity of the Gentile world. And with the diſbelief of revelation we find in fact, that the juſt abhorrence which all the Chriſtian world entertain for theſe unnatural vices diſappears; a proof of which might be given in ſome well authenticated anecdotes of the late king of Pruſſia, but not to be related in this place.

was

was to ſhew the abſurdity of the popular worſhip; but this is in the higheſt degree improbable. Indeed, nothing which ſhould have been ſuſpected to have that tendency would have been borne with, and they who made the greateſt account of theſe myſteries were the moſt devoted to the popular ſuperſtitions. The moſt probable opinion is, that whatever was the original intention of theſe private myſteries, they became a ſcene of ſuch exhibitions and practices, as were worſe than any that were tranſacted in public.

Socrates, the moſt moral of all the heathen philoſophers, and the leaſt attached to the vulgar ſuperſtition, would never be initiated into theſe myſteries. In the time of Cicero the very term *myſteries* was almoſt ſynonymous to *abominations*, and we may well ſuppoſe what the nature of them muſt have been when it is known that they were celebrated in the night, in honour of Bacchus, Venus, or Cupid, and that indecent images were carried in proceſſion in them, ſo that they could not fail

fail to countenance that impurity, and diſſoluteneſs of manners, which was ſo general in the Pagan world. To theſe myſteries it is moſt probable that Paul refers, when he ſays, Epheſ. v. 12. *It is a ſhame even to ſpeak of thoſe things which are done by them in ſecret.* Clemens Alexandrinus called theſe myſteries, "the myſteries of atheiſtical men," adding, "I may rightly call them "atheiſts, who are deſtitute of the know- "ledge of him who is truly God, and who "moſt impudently worſhip a boy torn in "pieces by the Titans, women lamenting, "and the parts which modeſty forbids "to name." A Roman conſul diſcover- ed that "the Bacchanalian myſteries "conſiſted of ſuch things as the moſt un- "bounded proſtitution could exhibit in "private and nocturnal aſſemblies, that no "perſon could be initiated into them "without renouncing his modeſty, while "the prieſts who preſided over them pre- "ſcribed in public, to thoſe who were to "be admitted to them, a ten days "abſtinence." Conſtantine, who forbad the

the practice of ſodomy in the religious rites of the Egyptians, forbad all ſecret rites of initiation in all the Roman empire.

But there is no occaſion to pry into the ſecret myſteries of the heathen religion for ſcenes ſufficiently ſhocking to decency. Public games and plays, in which the flagitious actions of the heathen gods were repreſented, were always conſidered as acts of religion, and celebrated in their honour, though ſome of the wiſer of the antients were aſhamed of theſe exhibitions. Cicero, ſpeaking of the adulteries of Jupiter, his raviſhing the boy Ganymede, and carrying him off to be his cup-bearer, ſays, "Homer feigned theſe things, and aſcribed human actions and qualities to the gods. I had rather that he had raiſed man to the imitation of what is divine." It is not, however, true that Homer invented thoſe ſtories. He only introduced into his poems what was generally believed in his time. "The ſame gods," ſays Auſtin, "that were ridiculed on the theatre, were adored in the temples." And what

what is particularly remarkable, is that worſe things were aſcribed to gods of the greateſt dignity, as Jupiter, than to any of an inferior rank. Such was the religion which Voltaire repreſents as perfectly innocent, with reſpect to its moral tendency.

Some of the rites of the antient heathen religions, which were not remarkable for their cruelty or lewdneſs, conſiſted of ſuch inſtances of ſavage ferocity and extravagance, as are not eaſily accounted for. But whatever was the *cauſe* that led to ſuch rites, the *facts* that I ſhall mention are unqueſtionable, and perhaps ſuch perſons as Voltaire would not have been ſhocked, but only amuſed, with them.

When the ſun entered Aries, at the time of the vernal equinox, the Egyptians celebrated a feſtival in honour of the ſun, when perſons of both ſexes counterfeited madneſs, ran about the ſtreets, and alſo up hills, and through deſerts, pulling in pieces the carcaſes of the animals they ſacrificed, breaking their bones, and eating

ing the flesh raw with the blood running out of their mouths, and committing every sort of extravagance. From Egypt this rite passed into Greece. At Chios, and also at Tenedos, they sacrificed a man, whom they tore in pieces in this manner. Plutarch, speaking of these things, says "These festivals and direful sacrifices, "which are celebrated with eating raw "flesh, torn with men's nails, as others "in which men fast, and beat their breasts, "were not, I think, performed on the "account of any of the gods, but rather "to mollify and appease the fury of some "evil demon. For it is not probable that "there ever was a god, who required "men to be sacrificed to him, as has "been antiently done, or received such "sacrifices with approbation." But Plutarch, from his own better reason, thought too favourably of the religion of his ancestors.

In the *Omophagia*, which was a festival of the Greeks in honour of Bacchus, the priests tore with their teeth, and devoured, the

the entrails of the goats which they ſacrificed, raw and reeking, in imitation of their god. And the *Lupercalia*, one of the moſt antient of the Roman feſtivals, in honour of the god Pan, was celebrated by the prieſts running about the ſtreets, naked, all but the middle, and ſtriking all they met, and eſpecially women, with thongs made of the ſkins of the goats, which they ſacrificed. And the women, thinking there was great virtue in thoſe laſhings, rather threw themſelves in their way than avoided them.

What a ſtriking contraſt with reſpect to all the things I have enumerated do we ſee between the religious rites of the heathens, and thoſe preſcribed to the Hebrews, in none of which is there any thing that ſavours of cruelty, immorality, or indecency; and yet Voltaire is ever loading the religion of the Jews with every term of reproach, and apologizing for that of the heathens.

The proper parent of all ſuperſtition, and falſe religion, is, as I have obſerved

ignorance

ignorance of nature, and the true cauſes of events; and men being naturally anxious about the good or evil that may befal them, not knowing, their true cauſes, but aſcribing every thing to ſome cauſe or other, were led, from circumſtances which it is impoſſible at this diſtance of time to trace, to fix upon cauſes entirely foreign to the purpoſe. But though their opinions, and ſome of the practiſes derived from them, cannot now be mentioned without exciting a ſmile of contempt, they were ſerious things in times of antiquity; and to have laughed at them then would have coſt a man dear.

When the ſun, and his emblem fire, were the principal objects of worſhip, it was imagined that no child would live or thrive, that was not made to paſs through the fire, and therefore the drawing them over lighted ſtraw, or any kind of flame that would not materially injure them, was deemed a neceſſary rite of religion. This we find practiſed by the Iſraelites, in imitation of their neighbours, during their defection from their own religion. Thus

we

we read concerning Manaſſey Chr. xxxiii. 10, that *he cauſed his children to paſs through the fire, in the valley of the ſon of Hinnom, as alſo that he obſerved times, uſed inchantments, and dealt with a familiar ſpirit, and wizards*, all which practices were of heathen origin, and deſerve to be particularly noticed.

The *obſerving times*, or diſtinguiſhing days into the lucky and unlucky, when they cannot have any real influence on the buſineſs tranſacted in them, was a very antient heathen ſuperſtition, and even continues to this day, though one of the remains of heatheniſm, in moſt Chriſtian countries.

Lucian, a heathen philoſopher, ſpeaking of unlucky days, ſays "on them neither "do the magiſtrates meet to conſult about "public affairs, neither are law ſuits de- "cided in the hall, nor ſacrifices offered, "nor in fine any ſort of buſineſs under- "taken, in which a man would wiſh "himſelf fortunate." He ſays that Lycurgus the great Lacedemonian lawgiver made a fundamental inſtitution of govern-

ment

ment, never to enter upon any warlike expedition, but when the moon was at the full; being of opinion that all things were under the influence of the moon, and that neither would their forces abroad act with ſufficient vigour and ſucceſs, nor would their affairs at home be ſo well conducted, in the increaſe, as in the decreaſe, of that planet. The emperor Auguſtus was ſo much a ſlave to this ſuperſtition, that he never went abroad on the day after the *nundinæ*, on which the public markets were held, nor did he begin any ſerious undertaking on the *nones* of any month. Ambroſe ſays that the firſt converts from heatheniſm were much addicted to theſe obſervances.

What is called *witchcraft*, which is another of the ſuperſtitious practices to which Manaſſey was addicted, was very common among the heathens. It conſiſted in the invocation of demons, in order to produce by incantation, charms, medicated compoſitions of herbs, &c. themoſt ſurprizing effects. This art Maimonides

ſays

ſays was much practiſed by the Zabii, and the Chaldeans; and it was very common among the Egyptians, and Cannanites.

None of theſe magical operations could be performed without a regard to the ſtars. For they held that every plant had its governing ſtar. With the heathens, therefore, theſe magical practices were acts of religion. By this means they believed that the demons were ſubject to them. In the antient heathen religions the moſt extraordinary effects, eſpecially of the miſchevious kind, were aſcribed to charms, and taliſmans, but it was ſuppoſed that they might be counteracted by more potent charms, though alike inſignificant. A ſuperſtitious perſon, ſays Theophraſtus, if he ſees a weaſel croſs his path, goes no farther, till ſome other perſon goes before him, or till he has thrown three ſtones acroſs the way. Many of theſe things, though abſurd in the extreme, made ſo deep an impreſſion on the minds of the heathens, that it was with great difficulty that they were brought

to

to diſregard them when they embraced chriſtianity.

It might be imagined that theſe idle notions and cuſtoms were peculiar to the vulgar among the heathens, but they were regularly practiſed by the graveſt magiſtrates of the wiſeſt ſtates in antiquity. For in fact when thoſe ſtates were conſtituted, the legiſlators themſelves were not, in theſe reſpects, more knowing than the reſt of the people. When any great public calamity was to be averted at Rome, the firſt magiſtrate went in ſolemn proceſſion, and drove a nail of braſs into the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. This was deemed to be the moſt effectual method of appeaſing the anger of the gods.

The greateſt ſtreſs was laid by the antients on ſolemn *imprecations*, as we ſee in the caſe of Balak, king of Moab, who at a great expence, ſent for the prophet Balaam to curſe Iſrael. For the curſes of prophets and prieſts, were thought to be the moſt efficacious. Hence it was cuſtomary for men condemned for any notorious crime

to

to be publicly curſed by the prieſts. It was alſo often done from particular enmity and faction. Thus when Craſſus the Roman triumvir undertook his famous expedition againſt the Parthians, his opponent Ateius Capito, the tribune, running to the gate of the city through which he paſſed, placed there veſſels full of burning coals, on which he offered odours and oblations, and then he pronounced the moſt direful curſes againſt him as he went along.

Prying into futurity was always a great object in the religion of the heathens; and from their ignorance of nature, they imagined that the gods, who were the rulers of the fates of men, gave indications of future events by various ſigns, which it was the buſineſs of the prieſts to ſtudy. This was the act of divination,

Divination was moſt commonly made by ſacrifices, and eſpecially by the obſervation of the entrails, and more particularly the livers, of the victims. This among the Romans was a ſcience of itſelf, and a diſtinct order of prieſts, called *Ha-*

ruſpices, were appointed to the ſtudy and practice of it. Another ſolemn divination was by the obſervation of the flight of birds, and this was the buſineſs of another order of prieſts, called *Augurs*; and unleſs their reports were favourable, no public buſineſs could be tranſacted. A peculiarly ſolemn rite of this kind called *taking the auſpices*, was by obſerving the manner in which a coop of poultry, which was kept for the purpoſe, ate their food. If they did it heartily, the omen was thought to be favourable, if otherwiſe, unfavourable; and ſo much were the minds of the Roman ſoldiers impreſſed by this circumſtance, that no prudent general would riſk an engagement with the enemy, till the augurs made a favourable report.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, did not undertake his expedition againſt Jeruſalem without firſt conſulting the gods, according to the rites of divination practiſed in his time, though we know but little of them at preſent. Thus we read, Ez. xxi. 21. *The king of Babylon ſtood at the*

parting

parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to uſe divination. He made his arrows bright, he conſulted with images, he looked in the liver. At his right hand was the divination for Jeruſalem, to appoint captains, to open the mouth in the ſlaughter, to lift up the voice with ſhouting, to appoint battering rams againſt the gates, to caſt a mount, and to build a fort.

It were endleſs to enumerate all the various modes of divination practiſed by the antient heathens, as by lots, by ominous words and things, &c. with alluſions to which the Greek and Roman writers abound, ſo that they are well known to every ſchool-boy. But one of the moſt extraordinary and direful of theſe modes of divination, that by having recourſe to the dead, I muſt briefly mention. This was the ſerious art of *necromancy*, to which Manaſſeh was ſaid to have been addicted; and to this king Saul had recourſe in his diſtreſſes. Thus alſo Ulyſſes is repreſented by Homer as ſacrificing a black ſheep in a ditch, and after pouring libations, inviting the ghoſt of Tireſias and others to drink of

the blood, in order to their anſwering the queſtions that would be put to them.

Similar to this was the *having to do with familiar ſpirits*, and *wizards*, with which Manaſſeh is likewiſe charged; for the anſwers received by this means are repreſented as ſeeming to come from under the ground, the place of the dead; as we read Iſ. viii. 19. *Seek unto them that have familiar ſpirits, and unto wizards, that peep and that mutter*, and Iſ. xxix. 4. *Thou ſhalt be brought down, and ſhalt ſpeak out of the ground, and thy ſpeech ſhall whiſper out of the duſt.* Sometimes the perſons who pretended to this art ſeemed to ſpeak out of their own bellies. Of this kind Maimonides ſays is the oracle of Pytho. "He is one," he ſays, "who after a kind of fumigation, "flouriſhes a myrtle rod in his hand, and "pronounces certain ſet words of in-"chantment. Then he ſeems to conſult one "who is talking with him, and anſwers "his queſtions, as it were from under the "ground, with ſo low a voice, that he "cannot

" cannot diſtinctly hear it, but muſt col-
" lect the meaning by his imagination."

Thus have I endeavoured to give you a general idea of the nature of the heathen religion, as it was practiſed in the earlieſt ages, and indeed as it continued, with little or no improvement, till the promulgation of chriſtianity. It was not, you ſee, a merely contemptible ſuperſtition, founded on the groſſeſt ignorance of the laws of nature, but ſuch as in the higheſt degree muſt have debaſed the minds, and have corrupted the morals, of men. How juſtly is the ſtate of the heathen world deſcribed by the apoſtle Paul in my text, and other ſacred writers; and how remote from truth, and the appearance of truth, is the account that Voltaire, and other unbelievers, out of a deſire to diſcredit revelation, have given of it. Surely then the rectifying theſe fundamental errors, into which all the world had fallen, with reſpect to religion, and the putting an end to practices ſo debaſing to the human character, and ſo deſtructive of human happineſs,

happineſs, was an object not unworthy of the great parent and friend of mankind.

That there was no proſpect of men, by any uſe they could make of their own reaſon, recovering from this deplorable ignorance and corruption, was evident by the experience of three thouſand years, in which, though many parts of the world became enlightened in other reſpects, they grew, if poſſible, more confirmed in their attachment to their religions received from their anceſtors; continuing to believe, notwithſtanding the ſtrongeſt appearances to the contrary, that the proſperity of their ſeveral ſtates, and even the fertility of the ground, depended upon the obſervance of their particular rites. And therefore as ſoon as the heathen magiſtrates ſaw the rapid ſpread of chriſtianity, and the danger to which their antient religions were expoſed in conſequence of it, they employed all their power to ſuppreſs it, perſecuting the profeſſors of the new religion in every form, though happily in vain. Truth, ſupported by clear evidence,

evidence, could not be overcome by power.

That nothing leſs than repeated interpoſitions of the deity could have preſerved any part of the human race from this ſhocking idolatry, ſo deſtructive of virtue and of happineſs, is particularly evident from the hiſtory of all the nations deſcended from Abraham, whoſe founders were, no doubt, inſtructed by him in the knowledge and worſhip of the one true God, and who, notwithſtanding this, all became idolaters. This was the caſe with the Arabs, deſcended from Iſhmael, and other ſons of that great patriarch, though in the time of Job, who was probably prior to Moſes, ſome of them were not ſo. This was alſo the caſe with the Edomites, though deſcended from Iſaac, and of the Moabites and Ammonites, deſcended from Lot, the friend and companion of Abraham. There muſt, therefore, have been ſome thing exceedingly faſcinating and plauſible in the ſyſtems of heathen worſhip, though to us, who have been enlightened by revelation, nothing appears more abſurd and ſhocking.

But

But *when the world by its own wiſdom knew not God, it pleaſed God*, as the apoſtle ſays, 1 Cor. i. 21, *by the fooliſhneſs of preaching*, i. e. by the goſpel (which at its firſt publication was ridiculed as fooliſh by thoſe who were reputed wiſe) to effect a reformation. And to this day there has not been any reformation of the moſt abſurd of the heathen religions, but by means of the goſpel. All that Mahometaniſm has done in this reſpect was by means of the principles derived from the Jewiſh and Chriſtian religions, the truth of which it ſuppoſes. Thus was verified the declaration of our Saviour, John xiv. 6. *No man cometh to the father* (or attains to the knowledge and worſhip of the one true God) *but by me*; a moſt extraordinary prediction, but abundantly verified by facts.

Can we then be too thankful to God for the promulgation of the goſpel which has not only *brought life and immortality to light*, by the clear revelation of a future ſtate; but has freed mankind from the groſſeſt ignorance, and ſuperſtitious addictedneſs to innumerable practices of the moſt hor-

rid and abominable nature; ſuch as furniſhed incentives and opportunity for every vice, the moſt debaſing of the characters of men, and the cauſe of infinite miſchiefs to them, both as individuals, and as members of ſociety. The goſpel, whatever elſe may be ſaid of it, has been, if there be any truth in hiſtory, the only, but it has been an effectual, remedy of theſe great evils; while all the evils that have been charged upon *it*, are clearly owing to a departure from its genuine principles, as they are now to be ſeen in the New Teſtament, the riſe and progreſs of them being inveſtigated with the greateſt eaſe and certainty. And as the reformation advances they are now every where abated, and may therefore be expected ſoon to diſappear, when the goſpel will again appear in its purity, the greateſt of bleſſings to all the human race.

DISCOURSE V.

The excellence of the Moſaic Inſtitutions.

Behold I have taught you ſtatutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye ſhould do ſo in the land whither ye go to poſſeſs it. Keep therefore and do them. For this is your wiſdom and underſtanding, in the ſight of the nations which ſhall hear all theſe ſtatutes, and ſay, Surely this great nation is a wiſe and underſtanding people. For what nation is there ſo great, who hath God ſo near unto them as the Lord your God is, in all things that ye call upon him for; and what nation is there ſo great that hath ſtatutes and judgments ſo righteous, as all this law which I ſet before you this day.

DEUT. iv. 5---8.

HAVING, in the two preceding diſcourſes, given you a view of the religions of the antient heathen nations, I ſhall now, by way of contraſt, give you a ſimilar view of that of the Hebrews; and this it will be the eaſier to do, as the original records of it are extant in the writings of Moſes, which were compoſed at the time of its inſtitution; ſo that there cannot be

any

any difficulty in diſtinguiſhing the genuine principles of this religion from the corruptions and abuſes of it. No other nation can give ſuch an account of the origin of their religion. For it is not pretended that any other has writings coeval with their inſtitutions. All the accounts of them are traditional, and their traditions are derived from the moſt remote antiquity; ſo that much is neceſſarily left to conjecture with reſpect to them.

The ſuperior excellence of the ſyſtem of Hebrew religion and policy, for they had the ſame ſource, and the moſt intimate connection, is ſtrongly aſſerted by Moſes in my text. On the other hand, Voltaire, followed by the generality of unbelievers, ſays, that "the Jews were "an ignorant and barbarous people, who "have for a long time joined the baſeſt "avarice to the moſt deteſtable ſuperſti-"tion. They have done much hurt," he ſays, "to themſelves, and to the hu-"man race." This writer had, no doubt, read the books of Moſes, and the other books

books of the Old Teſtament, for he frequently quotes them; but many perſons, without ever reading theſe books themſelves, take for granted that what he ſays of them is true. But, my brethren, be perſuaded to make uſe of your own eyes, and judge for yourſelves. To aſſiſt you in this, I ſhall, as briefly as poſſible, lay before you the moſt important particulars of which the inſtitutions of Moſes conſiſt, and occaſionally compare them with particulars of a ſimilar nature in the ſyſtems of the heathens, which were cotemporary with them.

In order to throw the greater odium on the Hebrew nation, Voltaire ſays, "they were ignorant and barbarous, that "they were never famous for any art, "they never were natural philoſophers, "geometricians, or aſtronomers." Admitting this to be the caſe, if there be any wiſdom, or ſuperior excellence, in their religious or political inſtitutions, it will be the more probable that they had ſome other ſource than any knowledge of their own.

own. But I do not desire to take any advantage of this circumstance.

It is not true that, in ancient times, the Hebrews were much, if at all, inferior to other nations with respect to the arts. In the art of war, which, even in the age of Moses comprized many other arts, it will hardly be denied that the Hebrews, if there was nothing miraculous in their history, must have excelled. For to say nothing of their emancipating themselves from the yoke of the Egyptians, then the most warlike people in the world, when they were wholly unprovided for the contest, they completely expelled the inhabitants of Canaan, ten times more numerous than themselves, who had horses and chariots of iron, and whose cities are said to have been *fenced up to heaven*, when they only fought on foot. The whole land of Canaan was of no great extent, and yet David conquered, and held in subjection, all the neighbouring nations; and it is probable that they continued tributary to the Israelites all the reign of Solomon.

Solomon. There are few nations in all antiquity that can boaſt of two ſuch princes as David and Solomon with all their faults.

The conſtruction of the tabernacle in the time of Moſes, and of the temple in the time of Solomon, ſhows that there were ingenious artiſts among them, as well as in other countries, and the knowledge that any people in theſe early ages had of real *ſcience*, that is, of the laws of nature, and the application of that knowledge to any uſeful purpoſe, was very inconſiderable. Knowledge of this kind would have prevented that miſerable ſuperſtition, in which, as I have ſhewn, the antient heathen religion conſiſted.

As to what is properly called *literature*, or the art of writing, and compoſing books, no antient nation can pretend to vie with the Hebrews. We have no account of any books ſo old as thoſe of Moſes, and though there is not in them the leaſt appearance of *art*, or ſtudied compoſition, they are written with that engaging ſimplicity, which has not yet been exceeded

by

by any writings whatever. The pathos in the addreſs of Moſes to his nation in the book of Deuteronomy, written juſt before his death, is inimitable. It is not poſſible to read it, if I may judge of the feelings of other perſons by my own, without the ſtrongeſt emotions. The incidents in the hiſtory of Joſeph were not the invention of Moſes, but they have loſt nothing in going through his hands. There is not, in all antiquity, ſo affecting a narrative.

With reſpect to the knowledge of human nature and human life, the proverbs of Solomon diſcover as much of it as the ſayings of the ſeven wiſe men of Greece, in a much later period; and for ſublimity of ſentiment, and energy of expreſſion, the pſalms of David, and the writings of Iſaiah, and other Hebrew prophets, though in a language but imperfectly known, and though they have ſuffered more than any writings whatever by frequent copying, are infinitely ſuperior to any poetical compoſitions of the Greeks or Romans in any age;

age; eſpecially if they be read in proſe tranſlations, which is all that we can do with reſpect to the poetry of the Hebrews, the meaſure of which is now loſt. Both are extant. Let them be compared by the principles of juſt criticiſm; but not by ſo prejudiced a perſon as Voltaire.

The Egyptians had the art of writing, but they had no books of which we have any certain account. The ſame was the caſe with the Chaldeans. And as to the Greeks, they were, in a period long after the time of Moſes, as barbarous and ignorant as the North American Indians at this day. If we may judge of the antient Hebrews by the Jews, who are deſcended from them, we muſt ſay that, with reſpect to natural ingenuity, or induſtry, they are far from being inferior to the reſt of mankind. They are perhaps rather ſuperior, not by nature (for in that reſpect probably all mankind are nearly equal) but in conſequence of the greater exerciſe of their faculties, owing in a great meaſure to the treatment they have met with from other

nations,

tions, and the manner in which they are compelled to provide for their maintenance among them. In Europe at leaſt, a very ſilly, or a very idle, Jew could hardly ſubſiſt.

But without any regard to the *people*, let us conſider their *inſtitutions*; and in doing this we muſt endeavour to forget, or overlook, principles that are familiar to us Chriſtians, and which we derived from the ſcriptures, and attend ſimply to the ſtate of the world in the time of Moſes, and the principles and cuſtoms which were then moſt prevalent, and which the Iſraelites themſelves had in a great meaſure adopted while they were in Egypt. Admitting that Moſes, in conſequence of his having been educated at the court of Pharoah, was acquainted with all the learning of the Egyptians, he had no opportunity of acquiring *more*, or indeed any knowledge of a different kind; and he was not likely to improve his knowledge of any kind by living afterwards forty years among the Arabs, where he married, and

was ſettled; having probably given up all thoughts of ever returning to Egypt, his life being in danger if he did.

Notwithſtanding this, at the age of eighty, he did return, and though Egypt was then in a ſtate of its greateſt power, and his countrymen in a ſtate of the moſt abject ſervitude, deſtitute of arms or friends, he effected their complete emancipation, in a very few months without the loſs of a ſingle life, while the Egyptians were ſo weakened, or overawed, that, though the Iſraelites continued many years in their neighbourhood, and without any connection with other nations, their old maſters never attempted to get them back again: and yet on account of the ſervice they had derived from them, they had been moſt unwilling to part with them. This, however, is a circumſtance, which, though highly favourable to the ſuppoſition of there being ſomething miraculous in their deliverance, I only mention by the way, before I recite the particulars of thoſe inſtitutions, which, in their ſtate of

emancipation

emancipation from their bondage in Egypt, and before they had got any other ſettlement, Moſes delivered to them.

In conſidering theſe inſtitutions, let us pay no regard to what Moſes ſays of their having been delivered to him by God, but only what they are in themſelves, that we may judge, from the circumſtances of the times, whether it be more probable that they were deviſed by himſelf, or that they were communicated to him in the manner that he relates. In this view of the Moſaic inſtitutions I ſhall not, however, ſtrictly confine myſelf to what may be drawn from the writings of Moſes, but take advantage of the farther lights that are thrown upon them in other books of the Old Teſtament, the authors of which had no other ſources of information. They are all written on the ſame principles, and in the ſame ſpirit.

1. You have ſeen the monſtrous polytheiſm of all the nations of antiquity. In direct oppoſition to this, the firſt, and moſt fundamental, principle in the religion of the

Hebrews, was that of the *unity of God.* The firſt of the ten commandments, delivered from mount Sinai is (Exodus. xx. 2.) *Thou ſhalt have no other Gods beſides me.* This precept is repeated with the greateſt emphaſis through all the writings of Moſes, and thoſe of the ſubſequent prophets. Deut. vi. 4. *Hear, O Iſrael, the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind,* that is, with an undivided affection, there being no other legitimate object of worſhip beſides him.

That this principle is a juſt one, will not now be queſtioned; but, compared with the principles and practices which then prevailed in the world, it muſt be pronounced to be not only juſt, but alſo great, and ſublime; being entirely remote from the apprehenſions of the moſt enlightened of mankind in that age. That ſuch an immenſe, and infinitely various, ſtructure as that of the world, or rather what was called the univerſe, conſiſting of all the

the visible objects in nature, the system of the sun, moon, and stars, as well as the earth and sea, should have had any proper author, and much more only *one* author, that one mind should perfectly comprehend, and direct, the whole, was utterly incomprehensible by mankind; and therefore they had recourse to a multiplicity of superior beings, each presiding in his separate province; and hence the idea of the different characters and dispositions, of the heathen gods, and the varieties in their modes of worshipping them. It is in vain that we look for such an idea as Moses gives of the Deity, even among the learned Greeks, two thousand years after his time, when they had long been possessed of leisure, and every other advantage, for speculations concerning the origin of the universe, which was indeed the great object of their philosophy.

2. You have seen in what strange *forms* the heathens represented their divinities, and under what symbols, as the figures of animals, and others, they worshipped

ſhipped them, a practice that muſt have ſuggeſted low and degrading ideas of their gods. And it actually led to the worſhip of the animals, and the images themſelves, divine powers being ſuppoſed to reſide in them. This was univerſal among the nations that bordered on Judea. The Perſians, indeed, who worſhipped the ſun, had no images of their god beſides fire: but all the nations that the Hebrews in the time of Moſes, were acquainted with, were properly *idolaters*, worſhipping their gods by means of images in various ſhapes, and the Egyptians the animals themſelves.

This ſource of corruption and abuſe was effectually cut off in the inſtitutions of Moſes. The ſecond commandment expreſsly ſays, Exod. xx. 4. *Thou ſhalt not make to thee any graven image, or the likeneſs of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters under the earth. Thou ſhalt not bow down to them nor ſerve them.* Alſo when Moſes, a ſhort time before his death, reminds the Iſraelites of what they had ſeen and heard,

and

and of their obligation to reſpect his laws, he ſays, Deut. iv. 14. *When the Lord ſpake to you out of the midſt of the fire, ye heard the voice of the words, but ye ſaw no ſimilitude, only ye heard a voice. Take ye therefore good heed to yourſelves, for ye ſaw no manner of ſimilitude on the day that the Lord ſpake to you in Horeb out of the midſt of the fire, leſt ye corrupt yourſelves, and make you a graven image, the ſimilitude of any figure, the likeneſs of male or female, the likeneſs of any beaſt that is on the earth, the likeneſs of any winged fowl that flies in the air, the likeneſs of any thing that creepeth upon the ground, the likeneſs of any fiſh that is in the waters under the earth; and leſt thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou ſeeſt the ſun, and the moon, and the ſtars, even all the hoſt of heaven, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heavens, ſhould be drawn to worſhip and ſerve them.*

The very idea of an intelligent Being, immenſe and omnipotent, and without any definite form, never occurred to any of the heathens. It is in vain that we look among their philoſophers for any thing

ſo

ſo great and ſublime. The leaſt degree of attention will convince us of the greatneſs and ſublimity of it, and yet it was familiar to this *ignorant and barbarous people* as Voltaire repreſents the Hebrews to have been.

Theſe great and ſplendid objects, the ſources of light and heat, and, as was ſuppoſed, of other beneficial influences, which were the primary objects of worſhip to other nations, Moſes always deſcribed as having been created by the one ſupreme God, as well as the earth, which was another great object of worſhip to the heathen world. According to the juſt and ſublime deſcription of the writers of the Old Teſtament, all things are ſubject to the controul of this one great Being, Dan. iv. 35. *He doth whatever he pleaſes in the armies of heaven above, as well as among the inhabitants of the earth beneath.* Heaven is the throne, and the earth the footſtool of God.

According to the principles of the wiſeſt of the heathen nations, *matter*, if not the world itſelf, with all the viſible ſyſtem

ſyſtem of things was eternal, and the gods who were the objects of the popular worſhip, aroſe out of it, and of courſe after it. For the idea they had received by tradition of *one God* having created all things, was ſoon loſt and forgotten, ſo that he was no object of their worſhip at all.

The ſupremacy of this one God, as the author, and lord, of univerſal nature, is declared in the moſt emphatical terms on a variety of occaſions in the Hebrew ſcriptures. On a ſolemn faſt, after the return from the Babyloniſh captivity, we find an addreſs made to God, in which they ſay, Neh. ix. 5. *Bleſſed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all bleſſing and praiſe. Thou, even thou, art Lord alone. Thou haſt made the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, with all their hoſts, the earth, and all things that are therein, the ſea, and all that is therein, and thou preſerveſt them all, and all the hoſt of heaven worſhip thee.* Do ſuch ſentiments as theſe, and ſuch language as this, beſpeak the Hebrews to have been that ignorant, barbarous, and

ſuperſtitious,

ſuperſtitious nation, that Voltaire deſcribes them as having always been?

3. Let us now ſee what are ſaid to have been the *attributes* of this one God, the ſole object of worſhip to the Hebrew nation, according to their own writings. The objects of the worſhip of the heathen nations, we have ſeen, were according to themſelves, all limited in their knowledge and powers, and indeed by one another, one of them being occupied in this province, and another in that. But the God of the Hebrews is always repreſented as omnipotent, omnipreſent, and omniſcient.

According to the ſublime language of the prophet Iſaiah (xl. 12.) *It is he who has meaſured the waters in the hollow of his hand, who has meted out the heavens with a ſpan, and comprehended the duſt of the earth in a meaſure, hath weighed the mountains in ſcales, and the hills in a balance. Who*, ſays he, *has directed the ſpirit of the Lord, or being his counſellor has taught him? With whom took he counſel, and who inſtructed him, and taught him knowledge,*

and

and ſhewed him the way of underſtanding? Behold, the nations are as the drop of a bucket, and are counted as the ſmall duſt of the balance. Behold, he taketh up the iſles as a very little thing. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him as leſs than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God, or what likeneſs will ye compare unto him? Have ye not known, have ye not heard, has it not been told you from the beginning? It is he that ſitteth upon the circle of the heavens, and the inhabitants of the earth are as graſhoppers, who ſtretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and ſpreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in. Haſt thou not known, haſt thou not heard, that the everlaſting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not neither is weary? There is no ſearching of his underſtanding.

What a ſublime idea doth Solomon give of the attributes of God, on occaſion of the dedication of the temple. 1 Kings viii. 27. *But will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee. How much leſs this houſe which I have built?* In the prophet Jeremiah,

miah, the divine Being is repreſented as ſaying, *Am I a God at hand, and not a God afar off? Can any perſon hide himſelf in ſecret places that I cannot find him? ſaith the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? ſaith the Lord.* The ſecrets of the hearts of men are repreſented as known to God. Jer. xvii. 9. *I the Lord ſearch the heart, I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*

Where ſhall we find in any of the Greek or Latin poets ſuch an idea of any of the heathen gods as David gives us of the God of the Hebrews in the cxxxix. Pſalm? *O Lord thou haſt ſearched me, and known me. Thou knoweſt my down ſitting, and my upriſing. Thou underſtandeſt my thoughts afar off. Thou compaſſeſt my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue but lo, O Lord, thou knoweſt it altogether. Thou haſt beſet me behind and before, and haſt laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither ſhall I go from thy ſpirit,*

or

or whither ſhall I flee from thy preſence? If I aſcend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in the grave, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, or dwell in the uttermoſt parts of the ſea, even there ſhall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand ſhall hold me. If I ſay, ſurely the darkneſs ſhall cover me, even the night ſhall be light about me. Yea, the darkneſs hideth not from thee, but the night ſhineth as the day. The darkneſs and the day are both alike to thee.

The abſurdity of the heathen worſhip, and the vain pretenſions of the heathen gods, are finely ridiculed by the Hebrew prophets. Iſaiah, foretelling the deſtruction of Babylon, a city peculiarly devoted to the worſhip of idols, ſays, chap. xlvi. 1. "Bel boweth down, Nebo ſtoopeth. "Their idols were upon the beaſts, and "upon the cattle, your carriages were "heavy laden, they are a burden to the "weary beaſt. They ſtoop, they bow "down together, they could not deliver "the burden, but themſelves are gone "into captivity." Jeremiah expreſſes

equal

equal contempt of them, when he ſays chap. viii. 1. " Thus ſaith the Lord, Learn ' not the ways of the heathen, and be ' not diſmayed at the ſigns of heaven, ' for the heathen are diſmayed at them. ' For the cuſtoms of the people are vain. ' For one cutteth a tree out of the foreſt ' (the work of the hand of the workman,) ' with the ax. They deck it with ſilver ' and with gold, they faſten it with nails ' and with hammers, that it move not. ' They are upright as the palm-tree, but ' ſpeak not. They muſt needs be borne, ' becauſe they cannot go. Be not afraid ' of them, for they cannot do evil, nei- ' ther is it in them to do good. For aſ- ' much as there is none like unto thee, O ' Lord. Thou art great, and thy name ' is great in might. Who would not fear ' thee, O King of nations, for to thee doth ' it appertain.

4. Conſidering the ſhockingly cruel and abominable cuſtoms of the heathens, we do not wonder that ſuch worſhip as theirs was moſt ſtrictly forbidden to the Iſrael-

ites.

ites. Indeed, to preſerve in the world the knowledge and worſhip of the one true God, was the great object of the inſtitutions of Moſes; and a greater and more worthy object cannot be conceived. In the directions that Moſes gives his countrymen, how they ſhould conduct themſelves in the land of Canaan, he ſays, Deut. xii. 2. 'And ye ſhall utterly de-'ſtroy all the places wherein the nations 'that ye ſhall poſſeſs ſerved their gods, 'upon high mountains, and upon hills, and 'under green trees. And ye ſhall over-'throw their altars, and break their pillars, 'and burn their groves with fire. And 'ye ſhall hew down the graven images of 'their gods, and deſtroy the names of 'them out of their places.' No idolater was permitted to live in the country of the Hebrews, which was appropriated to the worſhip of the one true God; and every Jew conforming to the heathen worſhip was to be put to death without mercy. It is to be obſerved, however, that the Iſraelites were not directed to propagate

gate their religion by the ſword, and compel other nations to conform to their worſhip. Their conqueſts, and the extirpation of idolatrous worſhip were confined to the boundary of the land of Canaan, the country promiſed by God to Abraham. Accordingly when David, who had more zeal for his religion than any of the kings of Iſrael, conquered all the neighbouring nations, he did not compel any of them to change their religion for his.

5. The characters of the principal of the heathen gods we have ſeen to have been ſtained with vices of the groſſeſt kind, and the moſt abominable rites were practiſed in their groves, and the temples themſelves, as peculiarly proper for their worſhip. The reverſe of every thing of this kind is always repreſented by Moſes, and the prophets, as the diſpoſition of the God of the Hebrews. Nothing of impurity, or indecency, was admitted into his worſhip. Nay the great object of the whole ſyſtem of the Hebrew religion was to form men to the perfection of mo-

ral

ral character; and all the rites and ceremonies of it are conſtantly ſaid to be wholly inſignificant without this. *Be ye holy*, ſays Moſes, Lev. xix. 2. *for the Lord your God is holy.*

When the Pſalmiſt deſcribes the character of the man who was acceptable to God, and fit to be admitted to his preſence, he ſays, (Pſalm xv. 1.) *Lord, who ſhall abide in thy tabernacle, who ſhall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteouſneſs, and ſpeaketh the truth in his heart.* On the other hand, vice and wickedneſs is always repreſented as the great, and indeed the ſole, object of his diſpleaſure. *There is no peace, ſays God, to the wicked,* Iſ. vi. 22.

The inſignificance of all merely ritual obſervances, in which the whole of the heathen religion conſiſted, compared with moral virtue, is expreſſed in the moſt emphatical manner by ſeveral of the ſacred writers as Iſ. i. 11. 'To what purpoſe is 'the multitude of your ſacrifices to me, 'ſaith the Lord? I am full of the burnt-

'offerings of rams, and the fat of fed
'beaſts, and I delight not in the blood of
'bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.
'When ye come to appear before me,
'who hath required this at your hand, to
'tread my courts. Bring no more vain
'oblations. Incenſe is an abomination unto
'me. The new moons, and ſabbaths,
'the calling of aſſemblies, I cannot away
'with. It is iniquity, even the ſolemn
'meeting. Your new moons, and your
'appointed feaſts, my ſoul hateth. They
'are a trouble unto me, I am weary to
'hear them. And when ye ſpread forth
'your hands, I will hide mine eyes from
'you, yea when ye make many prayers
'I will not hear. Your hands are full of
'blood. Waſh ye, make you clean, put
'away the evil of your doings from be-
'fore mine eyes, ceaſe to do evil, learn
'to do well, ſeek judgment, relieve the
'oppreſſed, judge the fatherleſs, plead for
'the widow. Come now and let us rea-
'ſon together ſaith the Lord, though your
'ſins be as ſcarlet, they ſhall be as white

'as

'as ſnow, though they be red like crim-
'ſon, they ſhall be as wool.

'Wherewith,' ſaith Micah, ch. vi. 6. 'ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow 'myſelf before the high God. Shall I come 'before him with burnt offerings, with 'calves of a year old? will the Lord be 'pleaſed with thouſands of rams, or ten 'thouſands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my 'firſt born for my tranſgreſſion, the fruit of 'my body for the ſin of my ſoul? He hath 'ſhewed thee, O man, what is good, and 'what doth the Lord require of thee, but 'to do juſtly, to love mercy, and to walk 'humbly with thy God." Paſſages equally excellent, and as purely moral as theſe, abound in the ſcriptures of the Old Teſtament.

6. The public feſtivals of the heathen gods were ſeaſons of rioting and lewdneſs, but thoſe of the Iſraelites were ſcenes of innocent rejoicing, joined with acts of devotion, which are by no means incompatible with it; and every thing relating to the ſervice of the tabernacle and the tem-

ple, was conducted with the greateſt regard to decency; while the utmoſt abhorrence is expreſſed for the horrid cuſtoms of the heathens. 'Thou ſhalt not, ſays Moſes, Deut. xii. 29. 'inquire after their 'gods, ſaying how did thoſe nations ſerve 'their gods, even ſo will I do likewiſe. 'Thou ſhalt not do ſo unto the Lord 'thy God. For every abomination to the 'Lord, that he hateth, have they done 'unto their gods. For even their ſons and 'their daughters have they burned in the 'fire to their gods.' And yet this very thing, which is here mentioned as the greateſt enormity in the worſhip of the heathens, viz. human ſacrifices, Voltaire ſays was practiſed in that of the Jews. Is it poſſible for effrontery to go farther than this? (except indeed his maintaining that the Jews were canibals, and fed on human fleſh) while without any evidence, but his own, and contrary to every repreſentation of the facts by heathen writers themſelves, he ſpeaks of the heathen feſtivals as mere ſeaſons of perfectly innocent feſtivity. But,

juſtly

juſtly or unjuſtly, every thing not Jewiſh muſt be harmleſs, and their religion muſt be, as he calls it, a *deteſtable ſuperſtition*.

7. While the religion of the Hebrews was free from every ſtain of impurity, it contained nothing of unneceſſary auſterity. It had no painful rite, except that of circumciſion, which, being performed on children of eight days old, who can have no apprehenſion of the thing before hand, and whoſe wounds ſoon heal, is a very trifling inconvenience. The Hebrews had only one faſt, and that of no more than a ſingle day in the year, but three feſtivals of ſome continuance.

In the principal of the heathen feſtivals there was firſt a ſolemn mourning, all the people performing whatever was cuſtomary at funerals, or in ſeaſons of great calamity. They tore their hair, ſhaved their heads, and mangled their fleſh. But the Iſraelites were expreſsly forbidden to do any of thoſe things, Deut. xiv. 1. 'Ye 'are the children of the Lord your God. 'Ye ſhall not cut yourſelves, nor make any

'baldnſs

'baldneſs between your eyes for the dead, '(that is for idolatrous uſes) for ye are an 'holy people to the Lord your God.' Theſe directions had no view to private mournings, for on thoſe occaſions they always did theſe very things, but to the worſhip of God.

It was the cuſtom of the heathens to imprint on their ſkin various indelible marks, being figures and characters expreſſive of their devotedneſs to their gods, which muſt have been a painful operation. But this was alſo forbidden to the Hebrews, Lev. xix. 27. 'Ye ſhall not make 'any cuttings in your fleſh for the dead, 'nor print any marks upon you, I am the 'Lord.'

8. If the extreme of auſterity was with ſo much care avoided in the Hebrew inſtitutions, that of ſenſual indulgence was avoided with more. Every incentive to lewdneſs, which was encouraged, and openly practiſed, in the heathen temples, was far removed from the worſhip of Jehovah. The heathens were fond of worſhipping

ſhipping on the tops of mountains, and in groves, in which every ſpecies of abomination was committed; and for this reaſon both were forbidden in the Hebrew worſhip, Deut. xvi. 21. 'Thou ſhalt not plant 'thee a grove near to the altar of the 'Lord thy God, which thou ſhalt make 'unto him.'

In the rites of ſome of the heathen deities men were habited like women, and women like men. This was more eſpecially the caſe in the worſhip of Venus. This manner of worſhip was alſo common among the Syrians, and Africans, and thence it paſſed into Europe, the Phœnicians having brought it to Cyprus. In a religious rite of the Argives, Plutarch ſays the women were clothed like men, and men like women. But in the laws of Moſes it is ſaid, Deut. xxii. 5. 'The wo-'man ſhall not wear that which appertain-'eth unto man, neither ſhall a man put on 'a woman's garment. For all that do ſo 'are an abomination to the Lord thy God.'

You

You have ſeen that the heathens had places adjoining to their temples, in which both men and women proſtituted themſelves in honour of their deities, and to augment the revenues of the place. With a view, no doubt, to this abominable cuſtom, the Hebrews were commanded to avoid theſe practices. Lev. xix. 9. 'Do not 'proſtitute thy daughter, to cauſe her to 'be a whore, leſt the land fall into whore-'dom, and the land become full of wick-'edneſs. Ye ſhall keep my ſabbaths, and 'reverence my ſanctuary, I am the Lord 'your God.

9. A ſuperſtitious reſpect for the heathen temples and altars made them aſylums for all kinds of criminals, and it was deemed the greateſt act of impiety to take any perſon from thence, whatever his guilt had been, and however clear the proof of it. But this was not the caſe in the religion of the Hebrews, which Voltaire repreſents as the extreme of the moſt deteſtable ſuperſtition. Ex. xxi. 12. 'He that 'ſmiteth a man ſo that he die, ſhall ſurely

'be

'be put to death. If a man lie not in wait, 'but God deliver him into his hand, then 'will I appoint thee a place whither he 'ſhall flee. But if a man come preſump-'tuouſly upon his neighbour, and ſlay him 'with guile, thou ſhalt take him from 'mine altar, that he may die." Where then do we find the proper characters of ſuperſtition, and where are thoſe of good policy and good ſenſe?

DISCOURSE VI.

The excellence of the Moſaic Inſtitutions.

Behold I have taught you ſtatutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye ſhould do ſo in the land whither ye go to poſſeſs it. Keep therefore and do them. For this is your wiſdom and underſtanding, in the ſight of the nations which ſhall hear all theſe ſtatutes, and ſay, Surely this great nation is a wiſe and underſtanding people. For what nation is there ſo great, who hath God ſo near unto them as the Lord your God is, in all things that ye call upon him for; and what nation is there ſo great that hath ſtatutes and judgments ſo righteous, as all this law which I ſet before you this day.

DEUT. iv. 5---8.

IN my laſt Diſcourſe I began to give you a general view of the religious inſtitutions of Moſes, correſponding to that which, in two preceding Diſcourſes, I gave you of the religion of the heathens, to which they were oppoſed: in order to enable you to judge whether it was probable that the former were deviſed by men,

men, or were of divine origin. You have ſeen that, in a variety of important reſpects, the religion of the Hebrews, ſaid by unbelievers to be a barbarous and ſuperſtitious people, had doctrines and rites infinitely ſuperior to thoſe of the heathens. I particularly mentioned the great doctrine of the Scriptures concerning the unity of God, in oppoſition to the multiplicity of heathen deities, his being repreſented as having no definite form, ſo as to be worſhipped under any image, his attributes of creating and governing the world, his omnipreſence, omniſcience, and infinite wiſdom, the perfection of his moral character, and his making the ſtricteſt virtue the great end of his worſhip. I mentioned the decency of all the religious feſtivals of the Hebrews, as the reverſe of the licentiouſneſs encouraged in thoſe of the heathens, and at the ſame time their freedom from any unneceſſary or painful auſterity, and the peculiar abhorrence in which human ſacrifices, and other rites of the heathen worſhip were held by the Hebrews.

I alſo

I alſo obſerved that the Hebrew altars afforded no aſylum for criminals, which thoſe of the heathens conſtantly did.

10. I now proceed to obſerve that, whereas much of the attention of the heathen nations was taken up with the ſuperſtitious practice of *divination*, in a great variety of forms, with witchcraft and necromancy; theſe being eſſential parts of their religion, and more ſtudied than any other (ſo that at Rome to deſpiſe the eſtabliſhed *auguries* would have been reckoned the extreme of profaneneſs) the Hebrews of all the antient nations, were entirely exempt from this wretched ſuperſtition, the offspring of the moſt extreme ignorance, though they knew no more of philoſophy, or the true cauſes of events, than other people. Every branch of this ſuperſtition was ſtrictly forbidden to the Iſraelites, as well as things of greater enormity. Lev. xix. 26. 'Neither ſhall ye uſe enchantments, nor 'obſerve times,' Deut. xviii. 10. 'There 'ſhall not be found among you any one 'that maketh his ſon or his daughter to

paſs

'paſs through the fire, or that uſeth divi-
'nation, or an obſerver of times, or an
'enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or
'a conſulter with familiar ſpirits, or a wi-
'zard, or a necromancer. For all that
'do theſe things are an abomination unto
'the Lord, and becauſe of theſe abomi-
'nations the Lord thy God doth drive them
'out from before thee. Thou ſhalt be
'perfect with the Lord thy God. For
'theſe nations which thou ſhalt poſſeſs
'hearkened unto obſervers of times, and
'unto diviners; but as for thee, the Lord
'thy God hath not ſuffered thee ſo to do.'
Is this any mark of the deteſtable ſuperſti-
tion, with which Voltaire charges the
religion of the Jews? On the contrary,
it is ſuch good ſenſe, as we in vain look
for in the religions of other nations, that
this writer repreſents as in all reſpects
their ſuperior.

Conſidering the very ſtrong hold that
theſe opinions and practices ſtill have on
the minds of men (for to this day many
chriſtians, and even many unbelievers in
chriſtianity,

chriſtianity, have great faith in charms, and other things of a ſimilar nature, relating to good or bad fortune, as inſignificant as the ſailors whiſtling for a wind) there is not a clearer and more unequivocal mark of ſuperior, of divine wiſdom, than the contempt that is ſo ſtrongly expreſſed for every thing of this kind in the books of Moſes, eſpecially conſidering the times in which they were written.

11. The heathens had many ſuperſtitious rules with reſpect to *ſacrifices*. Thus hogs were ſacrificed to Ceres, an owl to Minerva, a hawk to Apollo, a dog to Hecate, an eagle to Jupiter, a horſe to the ſun, a cock to Æſculapius, a gooſe to Iſis, and a goat to Bacchus: The Zabians ſacrificed to the ſun ſeven bats, ſeven mice, and ſeven other reptiles. The Egyptians were ſo far from ſacrificing horned cattle, that they worſhipped them, as alſo the ram. The Hebrews alone kept to the natural and rational idea of ſacrifices, which was to confine them to things moſt proper for the food of man, in order to

expreſs

expreſs their gratitude to God, as the giver of it, and, as it were, to be the gueſts at his table.

That ſacrifices, though not required of Chriſtians, was a natural mode of worſhip cannot be denied, becauſe they were univerſal, and are uſed by all heathen nations to this day. No philoſopher, in the moſt enlightened period of the heathen world, ever objected to them.

The heathens were uſed to reſerve ſome of the fleſh of the animals they ſacrificed for ſuperſtitious uſes, as the chriſtians, when ſuperſtition crept in among them, did of the conſecrated bread in the the euchariſt. For the chriſtians derived all their ſuperſtitious practices from the heathens. When the Mahometans ſacrifice a ſheep, as they always do on their pilgrimage to Mecca, they dry a great part of the fleſh, which by this means may be kept two years, and make preſents of it to their friends at their return. This was probably an antient idolatrous cuſtom, which Mahomet kept up. But to prevent

every

every ſuperſtitious uſe of ſacrifices, the Hebrews were directed to keep nothing of theirs till the next day; and no fleſh of the paſchal lamb was to be carried out of the houſe in which it was eaten. They were alſo ſtrictly forbidden to eat any part of it raw, Exod. xii. 9. which has been obſerved to have been a ſuperſtitious and indecent cuſtom with the Egyptians, and others.

12. Some part of the firſt fruits of their harveſts were reſerved by the heathens for magical purpoſes. On the contrary, the Iſraelites were directed, when they preſented their firſt fruits, to recount the goodneſs of God to them in the following pious form. Deut. xxvi. in the preſence of the prieſt. 'I profeſs this 'day unto the Lord thy God, that I am 'come unto the country which the Lord 'ſware unto our fathers for to give us." When the prieſt had taken the baſket out of his hand, and preſented it, he was to ſay farther. 'A Syrian ready to periſh 'was my father, and he went down into 'Egypt,

'Egypt, and ſojourned there, with a few,
'and there became a great nation, mighty
'and populous, and the Egyptians evil
'intreated us, and afflicted us, and laid
'upon us hard bondage, and when we
'cried unto the Lord God of our fathers
'the Lord heard our voice, and looked on
'our affliction, and our labour, and our
'oppreſſion. And the Lord brought us
'forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand,
'and an outſtretched arm, and with great
'terribleneſs, and with ſigns, and wonders;
'and he hath brought us into this place,
'and hath given us this land, even a land
'that floweth with milk and honey; and
'now behold I have brought the firſt
'fruits of the land which thou, O Lord,
'haſt given me.'

When ſome of the antient idolaters had gathered all their fruits, they took a kid and boiled it in its mother's milk, and with magical rites ſprinkled with it their fields, gardens, and orchards, thinking that by this means they would become fruitful. This practice was expreſsly for-

bidden to the Hebrews, no doubt, as ſuperſtitious and idolatrous. 'Thou ſhalt 'not ſeethe a kid in its mother's milk." (Exod. xxiii. 19. Deut. xiv. 21.) To this cuſtom it is not improbable that Iſaiah, alludes, when ſpeaking of idolaters, he ſays (Chap. lxv. 4.) 'Who eat ſwine's 'fleſh, and broth of abominable things is 'in their veſſels.' For they might put other things into the pot along with the fleſh of the kid. And on this account, when they had diſtributed their tythes, they were directed to ſay, (Deut. xxvi. 13.) 'I have brought away the hallowed 'things out of mine houſe, and alſo have 'given them to the Levite, and unto 'the ſtranger, to the fatherleſs, and to 'the widow, according to all thy com-'mandments, which thou haſt commanded 'me. I have not tranſgreſſed thy com-'mandments, neither have I forgotten 'them. I have not eaten thereof in my 'mourning (alluding to the ſolemn mourning in the feſtival of Iſis) neither have I 'taken away ought thereof for any un-

'clean

'clean uſe, nor given ought thereof for 'the dead,' (that is for idolatrous purpoſes) 'but I have hearkened to the voice of the 'Lord my God, and have done according 'to all that thou haſt commanded me. Look 'down from thy holy habitation, from 'heaven, and bleſs thy people Iſrael, and 'the land which thou haſt given us, as thou 'ſwareſt unto our fathers, a land that 'floweth with milk and honey." Here certainly is piety and good ſenſe, and nothing of that *deteſtable ſuperſtition*, which Voltaire aſcribes to this antient people.

13. The rules laid down in the books of Moſes for the *diet* of the Iſraelites, permitting the uſe of ſome kinds of food, and prohibiting others, will, no doubt, be deemed ſuperſtition by ſome perſons. But if the particulars be conſidered, it will be found that the Iſraelites were confined to that food which was the moſt wholeſome, and beſt ſuited to the climate they were deſtined to inhabit. On the contrary, there was real and mere ſuperſtition in the reſtrictions that many of the heathens laid

themſelves under in this reſpect, and in all antient nations religion was concerned in the choice of food. Thus the Egyptians would not eat the fleſh of a cow. It was commonly ſaid of them, they would as ſoon eat that of a man. Their prieſts, and the Pythagoreans, who followed them in it, abſtained from beans. The prieſts in Syria ate no fiſh, the Phœnicians no pigeons, and the antient Arabians abſtained from eating a variety of things, becauſe they thought them particularly conſecrated to ſome of the heavenly bodies, which were the objects of their worſhip, and becauſe they made uſe of them in their divinations. Moſes, therefore, or rather God by him, in order to counteract and prevent this ſuperſtition, (for it cannot be called any thing elſe, as the things refrained from cannot be denied to be wholeſome food,) eſtabliſhed a diſtinction of meats on a quite different, and perfectly rational, principle.

The article that will perhaps be moſt objected to is the prohibition to eat *ſwines fleſh*, which we find not to be unwholeſome. But the

the Egyptians, Arabians, and all the eaſtern nations, from Ethiopia to India, deteſt ſwines fleſh, and ſo do the Mahometans univerſally. As to *blood*, I believe it is generally allowed to be groſs and unwholeſome food; but probably the principal reaſon why it was forbidden to the Hebrews, was the uſe that was made of it in ſome of the ſacrifices of the heathen nations, who drank of the blood, by way of communicating with the infernal deities. For this reaſon too, it might be that, in the Hebrew ſacrifices, the blood was directed to be ſprinkled on the altar, or poured out at the foot of it. The blood was alſo conſidered as, in a peculiar manner, the ſeat of animal life; and by giving it back, as it were, to God, they acknowledged that it came from him.

14. There is, indeed, hardly any ſpecies of ſuperſtition that was practiſed by the antient idolaters that is not either directly noticed, or alluded to, and particularly guarded againſt, in the religion of the Iſraelites. The Zabians, it is ſaid, conſtruct-

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ed certain images, according to the conſtellations, which they called *taliſmans*, by means of which they expected to perform the greateſt wonders, and eſpecially to foretel future events. Theſe were probably the *teraphim* of which mention is made in the Hebrew ſcriptures; and it is well known that the uſe of them was condemned by Moſes; and the Iſraelites were directed to other means of becoming acquainted with ſuch future events, as it was proper for them to be informed of. But this I ſhall make the ſubject of a ſeparate diſcourſe.

There are ſeveral things in the Hebrew ritual for which we are not at preſent able to give any ſatisfactory reaſon. But this is probably owing to our not being ſufficiently acquainted with remote antiquity, and eſpecially the worſhip of the moſt antient idolaters, which it was the great object of the Moſaic inſtitutions to oppoſe. For this reaſon, and perhaps, in ſome caſes, for no other, the cuſtoms of the Iſraelites were ordered to be the very reverſe

verſe of thoſe of other nations. When the heathens worſhipped their ſuperior divinities, who were ſuppoſed to have their reſidence above the clouds, they did it not only on mountains, and in high places, but on high altars, thinking that by that means they had a nearer acceſs to the objects of their worſhip. For this reaſon the Hebrews were directed not to build ſuch altars, or to worſhip in ſuch places. The heathens uſed *leaven* and *honey*, in the cakes which they offered to their gods, whereas in thoſe of the Iſraelites they were both forbidden, but they were always to uſe *ſalt*. The heathens bowed towards the Eaſt, as an act of homage to the riſing ſun; and therefore their temples were made to front the Weſt, that when they entered them, which they always did bowing, it might be towards the Eaſt. For this reaſon the tabernacle and temple of the Iſraelites were made to look to the Eaſt, that on entering them, the worſhippers might bow towards the Weſt, turning their backs on the place of ſun riſing.

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The antient idolaters held *heifers* in peculiar veneration, and for this reaſon perhaps, it was ordered, (Deut. xxi. 3.) that if any perſon was found murdered, and the murderer could not be diſcovered, a heifer which had not been uſed to the yoke ſhould be ſlain in his place. It was not ſacrificed, but its head was to be ſtruck off. The Egyptians held in peculiar abhorrence animals that had *red hair*, which they ſuppoſed to have been that of Typhon. In oppoſition, perhaps, to this, the Iſraelites were commanded to prepare their water of purification with the aſhes of a red heifer, without ſpot, or perfectly red. Numb. xix.

15. Many unbelievers think that wherever there are *prieſts*, there muſt be *prieſtcraft*, and of courſe the intereſt of the people ſacrificed to their emolument; it being always, as they think, in the power of that order of men to impoſe upon the reſt. But there were ſeveral circumſtances in the ſituation of the Hebrew prieſts, which ſhew that they could have had no ſuch power.

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In the firſt place, the Hebrew prieſts had no *ſecrets*. Every thing that they knew or that they did, was as well known to the whole nation as to themſelves. It was all detailed in the books of the law, which were not confined to themſelves, as the ſacred books of the Hindoos are to the Bramins, but directed to be read in the hearing of all the people. To theſe books they always had acceſs, and the Levites were diſperſed all over the country, that they might with the more advantage inſtruct the people in them.

So far was Moſes from wiſhing that the prieſts ſhould have any advantage over the people by their ſuperior knowledge, that his exhortations to all the people to make themſelves accurately acquainted with the law are peculiarly emphatical, (Deut. vi. 6.) *Theſe words, which I command thee this day, ſhall be in thine heart. And thou ſhalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and ſhalt talk of them when thou ſitteſt in thy houſe, and when thou walkeſt by the way, and when thou lieſt down, and when thou riſeſt up.*

And

And thou ſhalt bind them for a ſign upon thine hand, and they ſhall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou ſhalt write them upon the poſts of thy houſe, and on thy gates. Had the Iſraelites obſerved this excellent precept, they could never have revolted, as they did, from their own religion to that of the neighbouring nations. It were to be wiſhed that Chriſtians would obſerve this excellent rule, or adopt the ſpirit of it. There would not then be ſo many unbelievers as there now are in Chriſtian countries.

There was indeed, a part of the tabernacle, and of the temple, into which only the prieſts entered, and another into which the high prieſt only entered. But there was nothing depoſited in thoſe places, or done in them, but what was perfectly well known to the whole nation, and they did not, and could not, pretend to derive any extraordinary powers from their having acceſs to thoſe particular places. Whereas, in all the antient heathen religions, there were *myſteries* or *ſecrets*, with which only the

the initiated were acquainted, and which were communicated to them under the moſt ſolemn oath of ſecrecy. Which of theſe inſtitutions then, bears moſt of the marks of prieſtcraft?

In the next place, though the Hebrew prieſts were of a particular family, and conſidered as the moſt reſpectable order of perſons in the nation, as being more immediately employed in the ſervice of God, they could have no landed property, and without this they could never attain any great degree of civil power; and in fact their judges, who were occaſionally appointed to direct the civil power, and the kings, who held it permanently, were never of the order of prieſts, till the time of the Maccabees, which was a long time after the Babyloniſh captivity, when they had departed very far from their original plan of government.

However, the prieſts of Iſrael were not ſo far a ſeparate order of men, but they were capable of civil offices. They were alſo married, and ſo much mixed with the reſt

reſt of the people, that they could have no intereſt ſeparate from theirs. Their chief dependance was upon the tythes which they received from the people, who by this means had them completely in their power. By this means, however, it was wiſely provided that it ſhould be their intereſt to inſtruct the people in the law, and keep them to the obſervance of it. But when the prieſts and Levites did their duty in this reſpect, and received all the advantages they could from it, it does not appear that the tribe of Levi, which comprehended the family of the prieſts, the deſcendants of Aaron, was upon the whole ſo well provided for as any of the other tribes. The Levites in general muſt have been poor; for when mention is made of charity, the caſe of the Levite is generally recommended together with that of the ſtranger, the fatherleſs, and the widow. Indeed ſome part of the tythes, as you have ſeen, were given to all theſe without diſtinction. Jacob, who foretold the future condition of all his ſons, ſpeaks

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of the Levites as well as the Simeonites, as under a kind of curſe. For he ſays of them, Gen. xlix. 7. *Curſed be their anger for it was fierce, and their wrath for it was cruel. I will divide them in Jacob, and ſeparate them in Iſrael.* This was a puniſhment for their treachery, and cruelty with reſpect to the inhabitants of Sichem.

Whatever advantage the Hebrew prieſts were poſſeſſed of, it muſt have depended upon their keeping the people to the ſtrict obſervance of their religion. But in this they notoriouſly failed (which is an abundant proof that their influence was not great) through the ſtrong predilection of the Iſraelites in favour of the religions of the neighbouring nations; and many times, but more eſpecially during the reign of Ahab, the prieſts of Baal had far more influence than the prieſts or prophets, of Jehovah. Elijah was then the only prophet who made his appearance, while the prieſts of Baal including thoſe of the groves, or rather of Aſtaroth or Aſtarte, were eight hundred and fifty (ſee 1 Kings, xviii. 19.)

19.) and there were not more than ſeven thouſand perſons in all the country who were not worſhippers of Baal (1 Kings xix. 18.) At the ſame time the influence of the court, and of the nobles, was in favour of that foreign religion. As to the prieſts of Jehovah, there is no mention made of them in any tranſactions of thoſe times, ſo that they could not have been at all conſpicuous. Whatever, therefore, of prieſtcraft there was at that time in the country, it muſt have been in the hands of the prieſts of Baal, and not of thoſe of Jehovah.

16. In all antient ſtates, religion and political inſtitutions had a very near connection. With the Hebrews, there was a peculiar reaſon for its being ſo. They were a nation ſeparated from all others, for the ſole purpoſe of preſerving in the world the knowledge and worſhip of the one true God, in a time of univerſal defection from it, and they were made to depend upon the providence of God, more immediately than other nations, God, according

cording to their original conſtitution, being their proper King, or ſupreme civil magiſtrate. He was *their God*, and they were *his people* in a peculiar ſenſe. In his addreſs to them, when they had left Egypt, he ſays, Exod. xix. 4. *Ye have ſeen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles wings, and brought you unto myſelf. Now therefore if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye ſhall be a peculiar treaſure unto me. For all the earth is mine. And ye ſhall be to me a kingdom of prieſts, and a holy nation.* He alſo ſays, Exod. xxv. 8. *Let them make me a ſanctuary, that I may dwell among them.* Agreeably to this, when, in imitation of the neighbouring nations, they wiſhed to have a king, it was conſidered as a rejection of the government of God, to which they had been ſubject, and therefore God ſays to Samuel on the occaſion, 1 Sam. viii. 7. *They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I ſhould not reign over them.* Under the immediate government of God, that of the Hebrews was an equal republic, while all the neighbouring

bouring nations were governed by kings, and in the moſt arbitrary manner. What could have led Moſes to think of ſuch an excellent mode of government as this? He could not have ſeen, or heard, of any thing reſembling it. For at that time no ſuch thing exiſted in any part of the world.

The religion and civil government of the Hebrews having this intimate connection, I ſhall mention ſome particulars of the latter, that we may ſee whether it was ſo very barbarous and abſurd a ſyſtem as Voltaire and other unbelievers repreſent it to have been, and whether the civil inſtitutions of other antient nations bear greater marks of wiſdom and liberality. But on this ſubject I mean to be very brief.

The great object of the inſtitutions of ſeveral of the antient nations was *offenſive war*, and *conqueſt*. That of the Hebrews was ſimply *agriculture*, which is certainly the moſt natural and rational object, leading to the happieſt ſtate of human ſociety. Foreign commerce was not encouraged, on account of the danger that was to be

appehended

apprehended with reſpect to their religion, from an intercourſe with foreign and idolatrous nations. And as a purely agricultural, and not a commercial nation, they were forbidden to take any intereſt for money lent to one another.

In order to attach them to the lands of their inheritance, the Hebrews had in their laws an excellent proviſion unknown in any other, viz. their reverting to the family of the original proprietors at the year of Jubilee, which was every half century, at which time alſo any contract which a Hebrew might make to bind himſelf to ſervitude was diſſolved. By this means it was not in the power of the moſt improvident ſpendthrift intirely to ruin his family. He could only mortgage his poſſeſſion for a limited time, nor could there be any inſtance of a permanently exceſſive landed property. What an excellent inſtitution was this for preſerving a reaſonable equality among this people, the only ſecurity for liberty, and alſo for creating an attachment to the ſoil, and of courſe the

love of their country, in which all hiſtory ſhews that no nation ever exceeded, or equalled, the Jews.

Beyond the boundary of the land of Canaan, which was promiſed by God to their anceſtors, and of which they got poſſeſſion not by any power of their own, but by the immediate hand of God, they were not to attempt any conqueſt. All their wars were to be defenſive, and when they took arms to repel an invaſion, they were ordered in the firſt place to propoſe terms of peace. In caſe of ſucceſs in war, and when, in conſequence of it, they marched into the country of the enemy, they were required to do no unneceſſary injury to it; and eſpecially not to cut down the fruit trees, and to ſpare all who did not bear arms.

Every Iſraelite of an age capable of bearing arms was, as in all antient nations, obliged to join the army; but at the head of it a proclamation was directed to be made, excuſing every perſon who had either lately married a wife, built a houſe,

or

or planted a vineyard, which would naturally make him more attached to life. Even if any man felt himſelf on any other account fearful and faint hearted, he might return home. It is in vain that we look for maxims of ſuch moderation, and good ſenſe, in any other antient nation.

The great ſtrength of any country conſiſts in its population, and ſuch were the principles of the Iſraelites, that with them beyond all other nations, celibacy was deemed to be a misfortune, barrenneſs a reproach, and a multitude of children the greateſt bleſſing. But in heathen nations many perſons devoted themſelves to a ſingle life as an act of religion; as the Veſtal Virgins among the Romans. They were heathen principles and practices that led to the ſyſtem of monks and nuns among Chriſtians.

The Hebrew inſtitutions allowed of ſervitude, but enjoined more humanity to ſlaves than thoſe of any other nation. If a maſter, in beating his ſlave, ſtruck out an eye, or even a tooth, he was obliged

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to ſet him free. Exod. xxi. 16. If a ſlave committed a capital offence, the judge, and not his maſter, was to pronounce the ſentence. If the maſter wilfully murdered his ſlave, he was to ſuffer death. The Iſraelites were not permitted to uſe the captive women, who were of courſe ſlaves, at their pleaſure. The law is ſo expreſs on this ſubject, that I ſhall recite it. Deut. xxi. 10. *When thou goeſt forth to war againſt thine enemies, and the Lord thy God hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou haſt taken them captive, and ſeeſt among the captives a beautiful woman, and haſt a deſire unto her, that thou wouldeſt have her to thy wife, thou ſhalt then bring her home to thy houſe, and ſhe ſhall ſhave her head, and pare her nails,* (as it is in our tranſlation; but the meaning is that ſhe ſhould make them beautiful by colouring them, which is at this time done in the Eaſt, and conſidered as a great article of beauty,) *and ſhe ſhall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and ſhall remain in thine houſe, and bewail her father and her mother a full month; and after that thou ſhalt go in*

unto

unto her, and ſhe ſhall be thy wife. And it ſhall be if thou have no delight in her, then thou ſhalt let her go whither ſhe will, but thou ſhalt not ſell her at all for money, thou ſhalt not make merchandiſe of her, becauſe thou haſt humbled her. We ſhall find no law approaching to the humanity of this among the Greeks or Romans, a thouſand years after this time, and ſtill leſs among nations of greater antiquity. How little will the treatment of ſlaves by Europeans bear to be compared with this?

Voltaire charges the Jews with a violent hatred of all other nations; but let us attend to their original laws and inſtitutions on this ſubject, Deut. xxii. 8. *If a ſtranger ſojourn with you in your land, ye ſhall not vex him, but the ſtranger ſhall dwell with you. He ſhall be unto you as one born among you, and thou ſhalt love him as thyſelf. For ye were ſtrangers in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. The Lord loveth the ſtranger.* Exod. xxii. 22. Many antient nations made great difficulties about the naturalization of foreigners; but among the Hebrews any

any perſon, being circumciſed, and conforming to the laws of the land, became one of themſelves in all reſpects. Only, for particular reaſons, perſons of certain nations could not be completely naturalized till after the expiration of a certain number of generations.

In all antient nations, and many modern ones, *torture* was made uſe of both in the puniſhment of crimes, and for procuring evidence. But no uſe whatever was made of it among the Hebrews. Puniſhment by ſcourging was limited to forty ſtripes, murder and ſome other atrocious crimes were puniſhed with death, but executions were performed by ſtoning or hanging, and the body buried before ſunſet. Where, then, are thoſe "cruel and torturous executions, and that unrelenting "vindictiveneſs" which Mr. Paine ſays contribute to make him conſider the Bible as "the word of a demon rather than the "word of God," and which makes him "deteſt it," as he ſays "he deteſts every "thing that is cruel." They have no exiſtence

exiſtence whatever, but in his own imagination. How eaſy is it to calumniate what a man does not underſtand, and what he is ſtrongly prediſpoſed to diſlike and miſrepreſent. In caſes of mere manſlaughter, a city of refuge was provided, in which the innocent author of the death of another, was ſafe from the purſuit of the relations of the deceaſed. Theft was puniſhed by reſtitution, by fine, or ſlavery, but not with death.

Such, my brethren, is the general outline, and ſome of the principal features, of that ſyſtem of religion, and civil policy, which Voltaire treats as moſt execrable; but judge for yourſelves with what juſtice. On the contrary, I have no doubt but that, if all the circumſtances of the Hebrew nation, and of other antient and neighbouring nations, could be known, we ſhould be ſatisfied that it was, in all reſpects, the beſt ſyſtem poſſible, as much ſuperior to any of thoſe of human invention, as the works of nature are ſuperior to thoſe of art.

DISCOURSE VII.

The Principles of the Heathen Philoſophy compared with thoſe of Revelation.

The world by wiſdom knew not God.
1. Cor. i. 21.

IN my two laſt diſcourſes I ſhewed you how greatly ſuperior were the religious inſtitutions of Moſes, though ſo much decried by modern unbelievers, to thoſe of the heathens, the ſhocking enormities, and groſs abominations, of which are ſo much diſguiſed and ſmoothed over by them. But becauſe it will be ſaid that what I then exhibited was only the ſyſtem of *ſuperſtition*, adopted by the *vulgar*, and that the more intelligent perſons among the heathens (though for political reaſons, they did not chuſe to oppoſe, and even countenanced it) held a more rational ſyſtem, I ſhall now

now ſhow you what that more rational ſyſtem was.

For this purpoſe I ſhall lay before you and in as intelligible a manner as I can, (for I will not undertake to make the two diſcourſes which, it will be neceſſary for me to give on this ſubject, perfectly intelligible to *all*) what it was that the philoſophers among the antients really thought concerning the ſyſtem of nature, and the government of the world, and alſo concerning the nature of man, and his future deſtination, with ſome of their ideas concerning the principles of morals, that you may compare them with thoſe that are advanced in the ſcriptures. And if it appear that thoſe are more conſonant to reaſon, it will afford a conſiderable preſumption that they were of divine origin. For how can it be ſuppoſed that the authors of the books of ſcripture, who had no advantage of literature, and whom unbelievers treat with the greateſt contempt, for their ignorance and barbarity, ſhould have adopted a more rational ſyſtem on theſe great ſubjects

jects than those who have been the most celebrated for their wisdom in the most polished and civilized nations in the world. It will be very easy to make this comparison, as there is sufficient evidence what the tenets of the antient philosophers were, many of their own writings being now extant, as well as the scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

1. It was a fundamental maxim with all the philosophers of antiquity, that *creation from nothing* was absolutely impossible; and many of those who admitted a principle of intelligence in the universe, maintained that *matter* in some confused chaotic mass was another principle, coeternal with it, and independent of it, and therefore could only be modified, but not destroyed by it. Moses on the contrary, asserts a proper *creation* of every thing that exists, antecedent to the *chaotic state* which he describes. Gen. i. 1. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.* And since the

properties

properties of bodies are all that we know of them, the appointment and changing of *theſe*, which the philoſophers admitted to be within the province of the intelligent principle, implies a power of proper *creation*, and proper *deſtruction*. For if we take away all the properties of any thing, nothing will be left. The ſyſtem of Moſes therefore, is more rational than theirs. This, however, continued to be the doctrine of the Greek philoſophers to the lateſt period of their hiſtory. Plato held that matter exiſted coeternally with God. Alſo, according to Zeno, the founder of the ſtoical philoſophy, "there exiſted from "all eternity a dark and confuſed chaos, in "which were contained the principles of "all future beings."

2. Another ſet of philoſophers, and perhaps of greater antiquity than the other, equally maintaining that creation from nothing was impoſſible, maintained that every thing, was originally emitted from the ſubſtance of the ſelf-exiſtent and ſupreme Being. And not only did they

ſuppoſe

ſuppoſe that *intelligent* beings of all orders proceeded from him, by this mode of *emenation*, as rays of light from the ſun; but that other ſubſtances of an inferior nature proceeding in the ſame manner from *them*, at laſt *matter* itſelf, the moſt remote from the divine eſſence, came into exiſtence, and therefore that this ſubſtance, of which they ſpeak with the greateſt contempt, had its origin from the divine eſſence. This was the ſyſtem of the Oriental philoſophy, which is ſtill found in Indoſtan, and other parts of the Eaſt, and from them was derived the doctrine of the *Gnoſtics*, by which Chriſtianity was corrupted in the time of the apoſtles. I need not ſay how far this notion of the derivation of every thing from the ſubſtance of the divine Being, deviates from reaſon. There is certainly nothing ſo wild and abſurd as this in the writings of Moſes, who always ſuppoſes God to have created all things, but not by the projection of them from his own eſſence.

The

The ſame claſs of philoſophers who held that every thing had been produced from the ſubſtance of the Supreme Being, alſo ſuppoſed that, after a certain period, they would be abſorbed into it again; and as originally nothing had exiſted beſides this ſelf-exiſtent being, he would again exiſt alone; but that after another period, other beings would be again produced from him, and that theſe ſucceſſive revolutions would go on forever. This ever has been, and ſtill is, the eſtabliſhed doctrine in the Eaſt, and it was adopted by ſome of the Grecian philoſophers, eſpecially the Stoicks, who ſaid that "the world, including the whole "compaſs of nature, both God and mat- "ter, had ſubſiſted from all eternity, and "would for ever ſubſiſt; but that the "preſent regular framc of nature had a "beginning, and would have an end, "from the alternate prevalence of *moiſture* "and *dryneſs*; that when the former pre- "vails, all things are deſtroyed by an *in-* "*undation*, and when the latter prevails, "by a *conflagration;* that, however, from "both

"both of theſe cataſtrophe's every thing "will again emerge, by the energy of "an efficient principle, when all the forms "of regular nature will be renewed, but "to be again diſſolved, and again renewed, "in an endleſs ſucceſſion."

This ſcheme excludes all idea of *melioration*. For according to it, every thing has been, and in all future revolutions ever will be, juſt what it now is. Accordingly Seneca ſays, that "many perſons "would reject this reſtoration of being, "were it not this reſtoration will be ac-"companied with a total oblivion of paſt "events." How far leſs rational, as well as leſs pleaſing, is this ſyſtem, than that of the ſcriptures, which ſuppoſes a conſtant tendency to a better ſtate of things, every rational being retaining his ſeparate conſciouſneſs, always diſtinct from the ſupreme Being, but making nearer approaches to him in perfection and happineſs to all eternity. As to any proof, or evidence, of the truth of this philoſophical ſyſtem, of every thing having been produced

by

by way of emanation from the divine eſſence, and being abſorbed into it again, it is only this; that there cannot be *two* eternal principles, and therefore every thing that exiſts, muſt have been derived, immediately or mediately, from *one*, and this one muſt have been the ſpiritual and intelligent principle. But will any modern philoſopher admit the validity of ſuch an argument as this, and adopt the concluſion? It is univerſally rejected with contempt.

As to the *eſſence*, or *ſubſtance*, of the Supreme Being, from which they ſay that all things were derived, it is a queſtion of no moment; ſince all that we have to do with are his *attributes*, as thoſe of power, wiſdom, and benevolence, in whatever it be that they may be ſaid to reſide. But according to our apprehenſions, there is ſomething degrading in the idea of his being of the ſame nature with all other beings, as he muſt be, if every thing was produced by mere protruſion from his ſubſtance. Zeno, however, ſuppoſed that both "the active and paſſive principles

" ples in nature," that is, both *God*, and *matter*, " were alike corporeal, only that " the former was a pure ether, or fire, " occupying the external ſurface of the " heavens, that is, a more attenuated kind " of matter." And Epicurus, conceiving the human form to be the moſt perfect, ſaid that, " though the gods were of an " ethereal ſubſtance, they were ſhaped " like men."

3. Both the claſſes of philoſophers, whoſe opinions I have now deſcribed, admitted a principle of *intelligence* in the univerſe, and a real diſtinction between *God* and *matter*. But in later times this was by many denied, and ſome philoſophers even proceeded ſo far as not to admit the exiſtence of any ſuch being as *God*, in any ſenſe of the word. Sanchoniatho, explaining the philoſophical ſyſtem of the Phœnicians, ſays, that " the uni- " verſe aroſe from the neceſſary energy " of an eternal principle, active but with- " out intelligence, upon the eternal paſſive " chaotic maſs." This is ſuppoſed to have

have been advanced in oppoſition to the principles of Moſes; but certainly theſe will not ſuffer any thing by the comparriſon. If there be no marks of *intelligence*, that is, of *deſign*, in the univerſe, where ſhall we find them? not ſurely in the works of men. How much more juſt and noble are the ſentiments and language of the Pſalmiſt, Pſalm civ. 24. *O Lord how manifold are thy works, in wiſdom haſt thou made them all.*

Ariſtotle did not in words deny the being of a God, but he ſuppoſed the univerſe to have exiſted from all eternity, independent of any wiſdom or contrivance, of his. He only conſidered him as the 'main ſpring 'of the whole machine, and therefore 'properly a part of it, employed, in ſome 'inexplicable manner, in communicating 'motion to it.' Strato of Lampſacus, a diſciple of Ariſtotle, held that 'the world 'was neither formed by the agency of the 'deity, diſtinct from matter, nor by any 'intelligent animating principle, but that 'it aroſe from a force innate in matter,

'originally excited by accident, and ſince 'continuing to act according to the pecu-'liar qualities of natural bodies. He neither 'denied nor aſſerted the exiſtence of a di-'vine nature, but, in excluding all idea 'of a deity from the formation of the 'world, he indirectly excluded him from 'his ſyſtem.'

Theſe atheiſtical doctrines were not confined to a ſingle philoſopher, or his diſciples, many of them, and thoſe of the greateſt eminence, entertained the ſame, or ſimilar, ſentiments. Democrates held that 'the firſt principles of all things were '*atoms* and a *vacuum*, in which, by a natural 'neceſſity, or fate, they perpetually move, 'and that from their combinations ariſe 'all the forms of things.' Pythagoras, alſo 'had held that 'motion is the effect of a 'power eſſential to matter.' Protagoras in one of his books, ſaid concerning the gods; 'I am unable to determine whether they 'have any exiſtence, or not. For the 'weakneſs of the human underſtanding, and 'the ſhortneſs of human life, with many

'other

'other cauſes, prevent us from attaining 'this knowledge.' But Diagoras openly denied the exiſtence of a deity. Heraclitus 'made uſe of the term *God*, but not to 'denote a diſtinct being of a peculiar na- 'ture, but merely a *natural force* in that 'primary *fire*, from which he ſuppoſed 'all things to have proceeded, and by means 'of which he ſuppoſed that its particles 'had been in eternal motion, and at length 'to have united, to form the preſent 'ſyſtem of nature. To this *force*, con- 'ſidered as diſtinct from *matter* on which 'it acts, he applied the term god.'

Epicurus admitted a deity into his ſyſtem, but it was chiefly to avoid popular odium. For he maintained that "the "univerſe always exiſted, and will always "continue to exiſt; for that there is no- "thing by which it can be changed. "There is nothing, he ſaid, in nature, nor "can there be conceived to be any thing, "beſides *body* and *ſpace*; that the atoms, "from which all things were compoſed, "are not only all the materials of which

" bodies are made, but that the *energy*, or " *principle of motion*, which eſſentially be- " longs to them, is the ſole agent in the " operations of nature."

As the Oriental philoſophers ſuppoſed that all things would be reſolved into the divine eſſence, from which they originally ſprung, Epicurus ſuppoſed that they would be reſolved into their original atoms. " The world," he ſaid, " is preſerved by " the ſame mechanical cauſes by which it " was framed, and from the ſame cauſes " it will at laſt be diſſolved. The inceſſant " motion of the atoms which produced " the world is continually operating to- " wards its diſſolution. For nothing is " ſolid and indiſſoluble beſides atoms; " whence it may be concluded, that the " time will come when nothing will re- " main but the original atoms, and infinite " ſpace."

Epicurus abſolutely denied all *wiſdom* in the conſtruction of the univerſe, even in the moſt obvious inſtances. " The " parts of animals," he ſaid " were not " originally

" originally framed for the uſes to which " they are now applied; but having been " accidentally produced, they were after- " wards accidentally employed. The eye, " for example, was not made for ſeeing, " nor the ear for hearing; but the ſoul " being formed within the body, at the " ſame time with the organs, and con- " nected with them, could not avoid mak- " ing uſe of them, in their reſpective " functions."

Can we attend to theſe things, and not be ſtruck with the truth of the apoſtle's obſervation in my text, *the world by wiſdom knew not God.* It was not even able to retain that knowledge of God which had been originally communicated to man. And how juſtly is their caſe deſcribed by the ſame apoſtle, in another paſſage, where he ſays, Rom. i. 21. *They became vain in their imaginations, and their fooliſh heart was darkened.* But are not their minds equally, or more, darkened, who can prefer the abſurd conceits of theſe philoſophers, to the rational doctrines of revelation?

tion? We ſhall, however, ſee more of the wanderings of the human imagination when left to itſelf, in what I have farther to obſerve.

4. The exiſtence of *evil* always created the greateſt difficulty to thoſe who ſpeculated concerning the origin and conſtruction of the univerſe, and the cauſes of events. Indeed, ſo difficult is the queſtion, that nothing but revelation could have ſolved it. In the ſcriptures we learn that *evil*, as well as *good*, is the appointment of the ſame great Being, but always for the moſt benevolent purpoſes. *Shall we receive good at the hand of God*, ſays Job, chap. ii. 10, *and ſhall we not receive evil?* ch. i. 21. *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, Bleſſed be the name of the Lord.* In Iſaiah, xlv. 6, 7, *I am the Lord, and there is none elſe. I form the light, and create darkneſs; I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all theſe things.* All theſe evils, in the adminiſtration of this greateſt and beſt of Beings, are ſubſervient to good, as the Pſalmiſt ſays, Pſ. xcvii. 1, *The Lord reigneth let*

let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of the iſles be glad thereof. Clouds and darkneſs are round about him, righteouſneſs and judgment are the habitation of his throne. But through theſe clouds and this darkneſs, the heathens, by the help of their greateſt wiſdom could not ſee. Some of the antients, as the Perſians, thought that there were *two independent principles* in nature, one the author of good, and the other of evil. The good principle they called *Oromazes*, and the evil *Arimanius*. The Egyptians alſo worſhipped an evil principle under the name of *Typhon*.

The Greek philoſophers in general conſidered *matter* as the cauſe of all evil. In their antient coſmogonies it is aſcribed to *chaos*. Plato held that 'there is in matter 'a neceſſary but blind and refractory force, 'from which ariſes a propenſity to diſorder 'and deformity,' which he ſaid, 'was the 'cauſe of all the imperfection which is 'found in the works of God;' ſo that he appears to have thought that matter, from its nature, reſiſts the will of the ſupreme artificer,

artificer, ſo that, on this account, he cannot perfectly execute his deſigns. Plato was alſo influenced by the argument from *contraries*. 'It cannot be,' he ſaid, 'that evil 'ſhould be deſtroyed; for there muſt al-'ways be ſomething contrary to good.'

The Stoics ſaid that 'evil was the ne-'ceſſary conſequence of eternal *neceſſity*, to 'which the great whole, comprehending 'both God and matter, was ſubject.' When Chryſippus was aſked whether diſeaſes were to be aſcribed to divine providence, he replied, that 'it was not the in-'tention of nature that theſe things ſhould 'happen, nor were they conformable to 'the will of the author of nature, and the 'parent of all good; but that, in framing 'the world, ſome inconvenience had ad-'hered by neceſſary conſequence to his wiſe 'and uſeful plan.'

How different is this from the ſublime doctrine of the ſcriptures on this ſubject, as when we read, Pſalm cxxxv. 23. *I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the Lord pleaſed*

that

that did he in heaven and in earth, in the ſeas, and all deep places.

5. It is in vain that we look for the rational and ſublime doctrine of an *univerſal providence* among the philoſophers of antiquity. But according to the ſcriptures, there is no event, great or ſmall, but what comes to paſs according to the will of God. Dan. ii. 20. *Bleſſed be the name of God for ever and ever; for wiſdom and might are his. He changeth the times and ſeaſons, he removeth kings and ſetteth up kings.* The proud king of Aſſyria, in the midſt of his conqueſts, is repreſented, Iſ. x. 5. as the *ſtaff* in the hand of God. At the ſame time we are aſſured by our Saviour, Mat. x. 33. that *a ſparrow falleth not to the ground without his will, and that the very hairs of our heads are numbered.* And this is true philoſophy, for ſo connected are all the parts of the ſyſtem, that the ſmalleſt things are as neceſſary as the greateſt, and in many caſes we cannot but ſee that the greateſt things depend upon the ſmalleſt. Voltaire juſtly obſerves that had a particular ſtone been thrown

thrown with a little more force, it would have given a different turn to the whole hiſtory of the Eaſt. It was a ſtone by which Mahomet was knocked down, as he was engaged in battle, but not killed.

There is moſt of the appearance of the doctrine of a providence among the Stoics. But according to Zeno and Chryſippus, 'there is in nature a *fate*, or an eternal 'and immutable ſeries of cauſes and ef-'fects, within which all events are includ-'ed, and to which the Deity himſelf is 'ſubject,' though the later Stoics, who wrote after the promulgation of chriſtianity, changed this *fate* into the *providence of the gods*.

Other philoſophers did not pretend that God, or the gods, had, in any ſenſe, or in any reſpect, the government of the world. According to Ariſtotle, the Deity, if it can be ſaid that he believed in any proper deity, 'is eternally employed in the 'the contemplation of his own nature. 'He obſerves nothing (this philoſopher 'ſays) he cares for nothing beyond himſelf. 'Reſiding in the firſt ſphere, he poſſeſſes

'neither

'neither immenſity nor omnipreſence. 'Removed from the inferior parts of 'the univerſe, he is not even a ſpectator 'of what is paſſing among its inhabitants, 'and therefore cannot be a proper object 'of worſhip.'

Epicurus, I have obſerved, ſaid that there were gods, only to avoid popular odium. According to his own account of them, they were of no manner of uſe in creating or governing the world. "There "are," he ſaid, "in the univerſe divine "natures, but that it is inconſiſtent with "our natural notions of the gods, as hap- "py and immortal beings, to ſuppoſe that "they encumber themſelves with the ma- "nagement of the world, or that they "are ſubject to the cares and paſſions "which muſt neceſſarily attend ſo great "a charge. We are not, therefore, to "conceive that the gods have any inter- "courſe with mankind, or any concern "in the affairs of the world." But, according to the ſcriptures, every thing is conducted by the Supreme Being, without trouble.

trouble. With reſpect to creation itſelf, it is ſaid, *He ſpake and it was done, he commanded and it ſtood faſt.* He ſaid *Let there be light, and there was light;* and the government of the world, is no doubt, as eaſy to him as the creation of it. It is, in fact, a continuation of the ſame exertion, whatever that be. But no idea ſo ſublime as this was ever entertained by any heathen philoſopher.

It was the conſideration of the immenſity of the univerſe, and the idea men had of the multiplicity of cares that was neceſſary to the government of it, that led thoſe of the philoſophers who ſuppoſed that the world was in any ſenſe, governed by ſuperior Beings, to think it neceſſary to provide a great number of them, each to ſuperintend his particular province. They had no conception of the ſublime, but truly rational doctrine of the ſcriptures, according to which one intelligence, one mind, perfectly comprehends, and directs, the whole. And yet the uniformity we obſerve in the works of nature might have

ſuggeſted

ſuggeſted the idea of one mind having arranged and directed the whole, immenſe as that whole is. But the amazing variety, and ſeeming diſcordancy, of many parts of the ſyſtem prevented their perceiving their uniformity, nor could Moſes, or any of the Hebrews, have been able to diſcover it of themſelves.

6. Mention is made in the ſcriptures of *angels*, as created beings, ſuperior to man; but they are never ſuppoſed to interfere in the affairs of men, except on particular occaſions, and by the expreſs appointment of the Supreme Being, never by their own voluntary agency. They are employed merely as *meſſengers* (for ſo their name in the Hebrew ſignifies) to convey the orders of the Almighty. But according to the ſyſtem of all the philoſophers, as well as that of the vulgar, among the heathens, there are beings inferior to the Supreme, who *at their own pleaſure*, interfere in the affairs of men, and act according to their peculiar humours and paſſions.

Among

Among the Egyptians the idea of one ſupreme God was, from the earlieſt times, connected with the belief of inferior divinities, reſiding in the various parts of nature, whence aroſe the worſhip of thoſe parts of nature. According to the mythology of the Greeks, thoſe inferior deities ſprung from chaos. Pythagoras ſuppoſed the region of the air to be peopled with theſe beings. whom he calls *gods*, *demons*, and *heroes*, according to their rank, theſe laſt approaching the neareſt to the nature of man, 'Theſe,' he ſaid, 'at their pleaſure, 'by means of dreams and other inſtru-'ments of divination, communicate to men 'the knowledge of future events, and the 'good demons are to be invoked by pray-'er.' Socrates admitted the exiſtence of beings 'poſſeſſed of a middle nature be-'tween the Supreme Being and man; and 'to their agency he aſcribed the ordinary 'phenomena of nature, and the particular 'conduct of human affairs; and he encou-'raged the practice of divination, under 'the notion that the gods ſometimes diſ-'cover future events to good men.'

Plato ſuppoſed that there were "ſub-
'ordinate divinities appointed by the ſu-
'preme Being, both to form the bodies
'of animals, and to ſuperintend the affairs
'of the viſible world.' Xenocrates, a diſciple of Plato, taught that 'the heavens
'are divine, and the ſtars celeſtial gods,
'and that beſides theſe divinities, there
'are terreſtrial demons, of a middle na-
'ture between God and man, and par-
'taking both of mind and body, like
'human beings, capable of paſſion, and
'liable to a diverſity of character.'

Ariſtotle, who believed in no particular providence, yet ſuppoſed that there were 'intelligent natures inferior to the
'firſt mover, who preſided over the lower
'celeſtial ſpheres.'

Though Democritus rejected the doctrine of a Supreme Deity, he admitted the popular belief of divinities inhabiting the aerial regions, ſaying that 'they made
'themſelves viſible to favoured mortals,
'and enabled them to foretel future events.' He ſaid, 'they were in form like men, but

of

'of a larger ſize, and a ſuperior nature; 'being compoſed of the moſt ſubtle atoms, 'and leſs liable to diſſolution than human 'beings, but nevertheleſs mortal.' According to the Stoics; 'portions of the ethe-'real ſoul of the world, being diſtributed 'through all the parts of the univerſe, and 'animating all bodies, there are inferior 'gods and demons, with which all nature 'is peopled. They conceived them, how-'ever, to be limited in their duration, re-'turning at length to their original, and 'loſing their ſeparate exiſtence.'

DISCOURSE VIII.

The Principles of the Heathen Philoſophy compared with thoſe of Revelation.

PART II.

The world by wiſdom knew not God.
1 Cor. i. 21.

HAVING given you a comparative view of the religion of the Hebrews, and that of the antient idolatrous nations, I began, in my laſt diſcourſe, to give you a ſimilar view of the principles of the *heathen philoſophy*, that it might not be ſaid that I took an unfair advantage, in relating nothing more than the opinions and practices of the vulgar among the heathens, inſtead of the real ſentiments of the wiſeſt among them. Theſe, however, I ſhewed you were, in ſeveral reſpects, far leſs rational than thoſe of the ſcriptures. I mentioned

their univerſal opinion of the impoſſibility of creation out of nothing, of the eternity and indeſtructibility, of matter; its neceſſary evil tendency; the doctrines of many of them, of the production of all inferior beings by emanation, or protruſion, from the ſubſtance of the deity, and their abſorption into it again; the abſolute denial of the being of a God by many, and thoſe ſome of the moſt eminent, of the Greek philoſophers; their various and unſatisfactory opinions concerning the origin of evil; their denial of a divine providence, their belief of the exiſtence of intelligent beings, inferior to the ſupreme, who at their pleaſure, and contrary to the will of the Supreme Being, interfered in the direction of human affairs. I now proceed to obſerve,

7. If the heathen philoſophers became ſo *vain in their imaginations*, when they ſpeculated concerning the nature of *God*, and the origin and government of the univerſe, and were not able to retain the great truths which mankind had received by tradition relating to them, much more did they

wander

wander in uncertainty and error, with reſpect to the doctrine of a *future ſtate*, concerning which, as I have obſerved, the light of nature gives us no information at all. On this ſubject, ſo important that without it the doctrine concerning God and providence is merely a curious ſpeculation, of no practical uſe, the principles of thoſe philoſophers who admitted a future ſtate are totally diſcordant with thoſe of the ſcriptures, which alone are agreeable to reaſon, though not diſcoverable by it. On this ſubject, I muſt be excuſed if I advance ſome things which will not be approved by the generality of Chriſtians, who, in my opinion, have not intirely got rid of doctrines introduced into Chriſtianity from a heathen ſource, from which have been derived almoſt all its corruptions.

According to the ſcriptures, the future ſtate of man depends intirely upon a *reſurrection*, to take place at a diſtant period, called the *laſt day*, and nothing is ſaid concerning the rewards of the righteous, or the puniſhment of the wicked, antecedent

to that time. Our Saviour recommending acts of charity, says, (Luke xiv. 14) *Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just*, and on no occasion did he refer his hearers to any state of things prior to this. When he speaks of being *cast into hell*, it is with hands and eyes, which are members of the body; and the rich man in the parable is represented as with a tongue, tormented with burning thirst, though for the sake of some circumstances in the parable the future state is represented as taking place before the proper time.

The Apostle Paul, comforting the Thessalonians on the death of some of their friends, refers them only to the resurrection, and gives no hint of their enjoying any degree of happiness at the time that he was writing, which would have been unavoidable if, in his opinion, they *had* been happy then, 1. Thess. iv. 13. *I would not have you be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that ye sorrow not as those who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so also them that sleep*

ſleep in Jeſus will God bring with him, and the dead in Chriſt ſhall riſe firſt, that is, before any change take place on thoſe who will be then alive. Why, indeed, did he uſe the term *ſleep*, if, in his idea, the dead were not in a ſtate of *inſenſibility*, and not to be awaked to life and action, but at the reſurrection?

Again, when the ſame apoſtle exhorts Chriſtians to live ſober, righteous, and godly lives, Tit. ii. 13. he directs them *to look for that bleſſed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt*, when he ſhall come again to raiſe the dead and judge the world. When our Saviour ſays that he will receive the apoſtles to himſelf, he refers them to the ſame time, and nothing prior to it, John xiv. 3. *I will come again, and take you to myſelf, that where I am there ye may be alſo*. When, therefore, the apoſtle Paul ſpeaks of being *abſent from the body and preſent with the Lord*, he muſt have meant the ſame great period, overlooking all that paſſed between the time of his death and his reſurrection, which indeed

indeed will only appear as a moment: as in the caſe of a man awaking from a profound ſleep.

When Moſes deſcribes the formation of man, he repreſents him as made wholly, and not in part only, of the *duſt of the ground*, and ſays after this, God put breath and life into him, thereby giving motion to the curious machine, which was before a lifeleſs maſs. It is to this doctrine of Moſes, that our Saviour refers, when he ſays that God is able *to deſtroy both body and ſoul*, or the power of life, *in hell*. For the word that is here rendered *ſoul*, is elſewhere rendered life, meaning that men, by killing the body, which God has been pleaſed to put in their power, cannot prevent its returning to life, this being in the power of God only. There is not, in reality, any more reaſon to ſuppoſe *life* to be a real ſubſtance, than *death*, which we nevertheleſs perſonify, when we ſay that *death comes*, and *ſurpriſes men*, and *takes* them. In the ſcriptures, both *death*, and *ſin*, are perſonified.

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The Gnoſtics, who were the firſt of the philoſophers who embraced Chriſtianity, could not diveſt themſelves of their prejudices with reſpect to *matter*, as the ſource of all evil; and thinking it the happieſt ſtate of the ſoul, to be entirely detached from it, they explained away the doctrine of the *reſurrection*, as to be underſtood of ſomething that took place during life. To them the apoſtle Paul alludes, when he ſays, 2 Tim. ii. 18. that *they erred concerning the faith; ſaying that the reſurrection was paſt already, and overturned the faith of ſome.* Juſtin Martyr, the firſt Chriſtian writer after the apoſtolic age, whoſe works are come down to us, enumerating the particular tenets of the Gnoſtics, who were deemed to be *heretics*, and not allowed to be properly Chriſtians; ſays of them, Dial. p. 2. ‘ They alſo ſay that there is no re-
‘ ſurrection of the dead, but that immedi-
‘ ately after death, ſouls are received into
‘ heaven. Do not take theſe to be Chriſ-
‘ tians.’

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This language of this antient and venerable writer, is not a little remarkable. Think not, however, that I approve of his harſh cenſure of the Gnoſtics. Others will ſay that they who reject the doctrine of a ſoul, are not Chriſtians. Both are equally reprehenſible. The Gnoſtics as well as Juſtin, believed the divine miſſion of Jeſus, and a life of retribution after death, and many of them were martyrs as well as himſelf. The doctrine of a future life, is the moſt important article of Chriſtian faith. The time, the place, or the manner, in which it will be effected, are all comparatively of little moment.

Though after this Chriſtians in general adopted the doctrine of a ſoul diſtinct from the body, they thought that, after death, it remained in a place under ground, called *Hades*, where it waited for the reſurrection of the body, when, and not before, it would be admitted to the immediate preſence of God and of Chriſt, in heaven. This continued to be the faith of the Chriſtian world, for about a thouſand years. They

pretty

pretty ſoon, however, made an exception in favour of the ſouls of the martyrs, which they thought went directly to heaven.

There are thought to be ſome traces of the doctrine of a reſurrection in the heathen world, as among the Chaldeans and Zabians. But if this was the caſe, the doctrine was ſoon obliterated, and ſpeculative perſons, thinking a proper *reſurrection* to be abſolutely impoſſible, and yet unwilling to give up all hope of ſome *future ſtate*, imagined that there was ſome ſpiritual, or ethereal, principle in man, which having exiſted long before his birth, would ſubſiſt after his death. For with the heathens theſe two doctrines always went together; and Origen, one of the moſt learned of the early Chriſtians, believed both the pre-exiſtence of the ſoul, and its ſeparate exiſtence after death. Afterwards Chriſtians in general abandoned the former, but retained the latter, though originally they were both derived from the ſame ſource.

But what evidence is there, from any appearances in nature, which is all that the

the heathens had to look to, on which their belief either of the pre-exiſtence, or the ſeparate exiſtence of the ſoul is founded. The former will be allowed to have been wholly chimerical. But with reſpect to the latter, is it not evident that the power of thinking depends upon the brain; and if thought is ſuſpended in the ſtate of ſound *ſleep*, and during a *ſwoon*, muſt it not be more effectually ſuſpended in a ſtate of *death?*

It will be ſaid that we cannot conceive of any connection between the properties of perception or thought, and the idea of matter. But we know nothing at all of the connection of any properties with thoſe of any ſubſtance whatever. Who can explain the connection between the magnet and the property of attracting iron, or the cauſe of the gravitation of all material ſubſtances towards each other? And what clearer ideas have we of the connection between the power of perception and thought with an *immaterial* ſubſtance any more than with a *material* one. Let

us

us then no longer cover our ignorance, or our fancied knowledge, with the repetition of mere words, to which we have no ideas, but confine ourſelves to known *facts*, ſuch as the ſtrict connection between the powers of thought and the organization of the brain. When that is deſtroyed, ſenſation and thought ceaſe; ſo that there cannot be any rational ground to expect the reſtoration of the one without the reſtoration of the other. And certainly the great Being who made man of the duſt of the ground, can make him again, though reduced to the ſame duſt. As to the *manner* in which this is to be effected, we know as much of the one as of the other; which is juſt nothing at all. But as the one has been effected by the ſame Being who has promiſed the other, we have no reaſon to entertain any doubt of its accompliſhment at the time appointed.

The only rational hope of a future life muſt, therefore, be founded on the ſcripture doctrine of a *reſurrection*, when the whole man, with all his powers, will be

be revived. That this doctrine of a reſurrection is inconſiſtent with that of a ſoul, which ſurvives the body, and retains all its faculties, not only unimpaired, but improved, (for ſuch is the original and proper doctrine on the ſubject) is obvious to the ſlighteſt conſideration. For if ſuch be the condition of the ſoul, when freed from the clog and obſtruction of the body, a reſurrection would not only be unneceſſary, but even undeſirable. The two ſyſtems are, therefore, repugnant to each other, and cannot be rationally held together.

The doctrine of a ſoul, and conſequently that of an intermediate ſtate between death and the reſurrection, has been the foundation of the worſhip of dead men and women, called ſaints, of the doctrine of purgatory, and many other doctrines of popery. Theſe, and almoſt every other corruption of genuine chriſtianity, came from the ſame heathen ſource, as I have ſhewn at large in my *Hiſtory of the Corruptions of Chriſtianity*.

The

The imagination of man being let looſe in ſpeculations on the origin and nature of ſouls, and their exiſtence after death, we do not wonder at the wildeſt and moſt extravagant hypotheſes on ſo obſcure a ſubject. The general opinion of the philoſophers was, that all ſouls, having been portions of the divine eſſence, or of the great ſoul of the world, and having contracted various impurities in their ſtate of ſeparation from their ſource, muſt paſs through a courſe of purgation, by going through various animal bodies, before they could be reunited to the fountain from which they ſprung, and to which they always tend.

The Egyptians, according to Herodotus, believed that when the body was decayed, the ſoul paſſed into that of ſome other animal, which was juſt then born, and that after it had made the circuit of beaſts, birds, and fiſhes, through a period of three thouſand years, it again became an inhabitant of a human body. They, therefore, endeavoured to delay this tranſmigration,

migration, by embalming the body, and thereby preſerving it uncorrupted, and in a ſtate fit for the reſidence of the ſoul, as long as poſſible.

Pythagoras, who borrowed his doctrines from the Eaſt, carried this of tranſmigration into Greece. He alſo held that of the final return of all ſouls into the eternal ſource from which they ſprung. It does not, however, appear that the doctrine of tranſmigration, though ſtill held in the Eaſt, remained long in Greece; but the doctrine of *pre-exiſtence*, ever accompanied that of a *ſoul*, and on this principle, the Grecian philoſophers believed its natural independence on the body, and its continued exiſtence after its ſeparation from it by death. Socrates held this doctrine, but either with ſome degree of doubt, or having no high opinion of the happineſs of a future ſtate*. Plato repreſents him as

* The heathens in general, at leaſt the Greeks, do not appear to have had any high idea of the happineſs of the beſt of men after death. For Homer makes Achilles ſay to Ulyſſes,

as saying to his friends, who attended him at his trial, 'whether it is better to 'live or die, was known only to the gods.''

Plato, though a disciple of Socrates, combined his doctrines with those of other philosophers, and had some peculiar ideas on this subject. These, on account of his great celebrity, I must not omit to mention, if it were only to shew what very absurd and extravagant notions the greatest of men have adopted when destitute of the light of revelation. He supposed that 'there exists something between *God*, and 'the *matter* of which the world was form-'ed, which he calls *ideas*, existing in the 'divine mind; and as external objects are 'perceived by the *senses*, these can only be 'perceived by the *intellect*.' Sensible things, he said, 'being in a state of continual 'fluctuation, cannot be the object of '*science*, but these *ideas*, being permanent, '*may*, and by the contemplation of them,

Ulysses, when he found him in the Elysian fields, 'I had 'rather be a poor man, and serve another poor man, who 'had himself a bare sufficiency of food, on earth, than rule 'over all the dead.'

'he

'he ſuppoſed that men might attain to a 'kind of union with God, in whoſe mind 'thoſe ideas exiſt. He alſo ſuppoſed that 'there is a *third ſubſtance*, compoſed of 'ſpirit and matter, diffuſed through the 'univerſe, and the animating ſoul of 'the world; that the ſouls of men are 'not derived immediately from God, but 'from this ſoul of the world, which from 'its origin was debaſed by a mixture of 'material principle. He ſaid that when 'God formed the univerſe, he ſeparated 'from the ſoul of the world, a number of 'inferior ſouls, equal in number to the 'ſtars, and aſſigned to each its proper ce-'leſtial abode; but that theſe ſouls (from 'what reaſon does not appear) were ſent 'down to the earth, as into a ſepulchre, 'or priſon, and that it is only by diſen-'gaging itſelf from animal paſſions, and 'riſing above ſenſible objects, to the con-'templation of the world of intelligence,' (the *ideas* above mentioned) 'that the 'ſoul of man can be prepared to return 'to its deſtined habitation.'

He

He moreover held that 'the ſoul con-
'ſiſts of three parts, the firſt the ſeat of
'intelligence, the ſecond of the paſſions,
and the third of appetite, and he aſſigned
to each its proper place in the human body.

The Stoics thought very differently from each other concerning the duration of ſouls. 'Some of them were of opinion 'that they would all remain till the general 'conflagration; ſome that only thoſe of 'the wiſe and good would continue ſo 'long; ſome thought that all ſouls, on be-'ing releaſed from their bodies, would be 'immediately abſorbed in the ſoul of the 'world; ſome that ſouls being of the na-'ture of *fire*, would be extinguiſhed at 'death; others that the ſoul was ſo con-'fined in the groſs body, that it could not 'find a paſſage out even at death, but 'muſt remain till it was intirely deſtroyed. 'Some of the Stoics thought that, in the 'univerſal reſtoration of nature, each in-'dividual would return to its former body, 'but others thought that then only ſimilar 'ſouls would be placed in ſimilar bodies.

Uncertainty cannot be more ſtrongly indicated than in this diverſity of opinion.

It does not appear whether Ariſtotle thought the human ſoul to be mortal or immortal; but the former is the more probable, from his opinion concerning the nature and origin of it. For he ſays 'it 'is an intellectual power, externally tranſ-'mitted into the human body, from the 'common ſource of rationality to human 'beings.' He does not ſay what he conceived this univerſal principle to be; but there is no proof that he ſuppoſed this principle continued with any individual after death.

If we may collect the ſentiments of Ariſtotle from thoſe of his followers, we may certainly conclude that he did not expect that men would in any ſenſe, ſurvive death. Dicæarchus, an Ariſtotelian, held that 'there was no ſuch thing as *mind*, 'or *ſoul*, in man or beaſt, that the principle 'by which animals perceive is equally dif-'fuſed through the body, and inſeparable 'from it.' Alexander Aphrodiſœus, another

other follower of Ariſtotle, ſaid that ‘ the ‘ ſoul was not a diſtinct ſubſtance itſelf, but ‘ the form of an organized body,’ meaning probably, that it was a property that was the reſult of organization. Theophraſtus, an Ariſtotelian, at the cloſe of life, expreſſed great regret at the ſhortneſs of it, and complained that ‘ nature ‘ had given long life to ſtags and crows, ‘ to whom it is of little value, and had ‘ denied it to man, who, in a longer du‘ ration, might have been able to attain ‘ the ſummit of ſcience, but now, as ſoon ‘ as he arrives within ſight of it, he is ta‘ ken away.’ His laſt advice to his diſciples was that, ‘ ſince it is the lot of man ‘ to die, as ſoon as he begins to live, they ‘ ſhould take more pains to enjoy life, than ‘ to acquire poſthumous fame.’ Indeed the natural inference from this doctrine is, as the Apoſtle expreſſes it, *Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die.*

The great father of modern unbelievers among Mahometans and Chriſtians, was Averroes, a Saracen, devoted to the phi-

loſophy of Ariſtotle, whoſe writings made all the unbelievers in the age of Petrarch, and that of Pope Leo X. He held 'the 'eternity of the world, and the exiſtence 'of one univerſal intellect, the ſource of 'all human intelligence, into which every 'ſeparate intelligence will finally be re-'ſolved, and conſequently he denied the 'diſtinct exiſtence, and proper immortality 'of the human ſoul.' I need not ſay how irrational this notion, ſo long prevalent with thoſe who ridiculed the ſcriptures, is. Modern unbelievers will ſmile at the extreme abſurdity of it, as much as any Chriſtians, and ſo they will at all the ſyſtems of their predeceſſors, the heathen philoſophers; though in a general way, with a view to diſparage the writers of the ſcriptures, they, but with little real knowledge of them, occaſionally cry them up.

I hardly need to mention any more of theſe vague opinions, altogether deſtitute of proof, or probability. But I ſhall obſerve that Democritus ſaid that 'men were firſt

'produced

'produced from water and earth, and 'that the ſoul, or the principle of animal 'life and motion, is the reſult of a com-'bination of round and fiery particles, and 'is mortal, and periſhes with the body.' And Epicurus ſaid, 'the ſoul is a ſubtle 'corporeal ſubſtance, compoſed of the 'fineſt atoms.'

The principles of ſound reaſoning and true philoſophy, have ſufficiently exploded all theſe crude ſyſtems, the beſt of which never produced ſuch a perſuaſion concerning a future ſtate as men could act upon, and ſuffer and die for; whereas the faith of Jews, and Chriſtians, has unqueſtionably produced, and does ſtill produce, theſe ſubſtantial fruits. And if the great end of *theory*, as it undoubtedly is, be *practice*, a doctrine which is both rational in itſelf, and ſupported by ſufficient authority, muſt be infinitely preferable to ſuch wild and incoherent ſyſtems as thoſe of the antient philoſophers, the knowledge of which, moreover, never extended beyond their own diſciples, and which does

not

not appear to have had any real influence even upon them.

But the great queſtion before us at preſent is this; if Moſes, and the other writers of the Old and New Teſtament, are to be claſſed with *philoſophers* or *legiſlators*, how came they to frame a ſyſtem ſo fundamentally different from any that other philoſophers and legiſlators of the ſame age had conceived? And if they were *not*, but are to be conſidered as perſons who had no advantage of learning or education, and therefore to be claſſed among the *vulgar*, and the vulgar of a rude and barbarous nation, as the Jews are generally conſidered, how came they to diſcover ſo much true knowledge, and adopt a ſyſtem of religion, laws, and morals, which cannot be denied to be free from the crude conceptions, and groſs abſurdities, with which the ſyſtems of the boaſted philoſophers of the heathen world are chargeable? The only anſwer is, that what they wrote was from a ſource of wiſdom *not their own*, or any that they could

could have borrowed from the neighbouring nations, but one much ſuperior; and as they profeſs, *from God*. But what are we to think of thoſe, who with the facts that I have recited before them, whether they will attend to them or not, are continually exclaiming againſt the religion of the Bible, without ſparing any term of reproach, and praiſing the ſuperior attainments, and philoſophy, of the Greeks and Romans. Happily, however, there are facts enow before us, and abundantly aſcertained, by which impartial perſons may eaſily form a true judgment concerning both; and I hope there is yet in the world common ſenſe, and candour too, ſufficient to make a juſt compariſon between them.

8. In a former diſcourſe I ſhewed you to what horrid and abominable practices the popular religions among the heathens led. But theſe, it may be ſaid, were peculiar to the *vulgar*, and that the *philoſophers* would not fail to condemn thoſe practices. This, however, was far from being the caſe. Many of the philoſophers, no doubt, knew

knew better, and among themſelves deſpiſed and ridiculed the popular ſuperſtitions, at leaſt ſome of them; but they had not the juſt courage in the cauſe of truth and virtue, to run any riſque in oppoſing ſo deſtructive a torrent. They themſelves conformed to all the ſuperſtitious practices of thoſe times, and recommended the ſame to others. Xenophon began his account of his beloved maſter Socrates, with ſaying, that 'he wondered how he came to 'be charged with not believing in the gods 'of his country, when he not only joined 'in the public ſacrifices, but frequently 'ſacrificed in private, and openly practiſed 'divination, which was always deemed a 'part of religion.' Socrates himſelf ſaid, 'that it is the duty of every perſon, to 'follow the cuſtoms of his country, in all 'its religious rites.' In ſuch veneration did ſeveral of the philoſophers hold the laws of their country, that they maintained there was no other rule of right and wrong. This doctrine was avowed by Democritus and Ariſtippus. I need not obſerve how

abſurd

abſurd this maxim was. Were the laws themſelves framed by no rules of natural right or wrong? and how are we, on this principle, to make an eſtimate of the comparative excellence of different ſyſtems of law?

So far were the antient philoſophers from entertaining the liberal ſentiments which it is now the faſhion to aſcribe to them, that, in a period of three hundred years, during which the Chriſtians were perſecuted, as oppoſers of the vulgar ſuperſtition, there is no example of any philoſopher pleading for the toleration of them. On the contrary, they were often the foremoſt to promote the perſecution. The celebrated emperor Marcus Aurelius, who was himſelf an eminent philoſopher, was one of the moſt unrelenting perſecutors of Chriſtians.

9. As ſeveral of the philoſophers were aware that ſome of their tenets would have given offence to the vulgar, either from the nature of them, or from their being liable to be miſunderſtood, they had *doctrines*, which

which they communicated only to a few, and this under a ſtrict injunction of ſecrecy. This practice was adopted by Pythagoras from the Egyptian prieſts. He moreover enjoined upon his pupils a ſilence of two, and ſometimes of five, years. In this ſtate of probation they were not permitted even to ſee their maſter, or to hear him, except from behind a curtain, and when they were admitted to his preſence, and favoured with his ſecret doctrines, they bound themſelves by an oath not to divulge them. Something of this nature was adopted by Plato. He ſaid, 'it is a difficult thing to 'diſcover the nature of the creator of the 'univerſe, and being diſcovered, it is im-'poſſible, and would be impious, to expoſe 'the diſcovery to vulgar underſtandings. 'He therefore threw a veil of obſcurity 'over his public inſtructions, which was 'only removed for the benefit of thoſe 'who were thought worthy to be admit-'ted to his more private and confidential 'lectures.'

But

But how much more noble was the conduct of Moſes, and of our Saviour, who made no ſecret of any thing that they taught? How much dignity was there in the charge that Jeſus gave to his apoſtles, to publiſh every thing that they knew of his doctrines, Mat. x. 27. *What I tell you in darkneſs, that ſpeak ye in the light, and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the houſe tops.*

10. In general, no doubt, the heathen philoſophers had juſt ideas concerning moral virtues, and in their writings they expreſs themſelves with truth and energy on the ſubject; but in ſeveral reſpects their peculiar tenets miſled them, and were unfavourable to a right diſpoſition of mind, and a proper conduct in life. This could not but be the caſe with the Stoics, the moſt rigidly moral of all the antient ſects. Their opinion that all ſouls are portions of the divinity, from which they inferred that they were ſufficient for their own happineſs, inſpired them with a great degree of pride. For they ſaid, 'it was

'not

'not in the power of the gods to make a 'good man unhappy.' They maintained that pain was no evil, and that a wife man may be happy even in the midſt of torture. They alſo held that he ought to be free from every emotion of affection or paſſion. Nature would never ſuffer any man to reduce this abſurd ſyſtem to practice; but the attempt to do it muſt have had an unfavourable influence on a man's temper and conduct. Whether conſiſtently with their principles, or not, many of the more eminent of the Stoics put an end to their own lives. This was done by Zeno himſelf, the founder of the ſect, when, in a very advanced age, he was in much pain from breaking his finger.

11. It is common with unbelievers to decry both Chriſtianity and Judaiſm, as ſpecies of *ſuperſtition*. But no miſconceptions or abuſe, of the Jewiſh or Chriſtian religions, led to more abſurd ſuperſtitions than the doctrines of the heathen philoſophers, concerning the defiling nature of matter, their conſequent contempt for the body

body, and their ideas of the purification of the ſoul by the mortification of it, It was, in fact, from the heathen philoſophers that the Chriſtians of the ſecond and following centuries derived their opinions and practices on the ſubject. It was from them alſo that the monkiſh ideas of the ſuperior merit of a *contemplative* to an *active* life, and of the value of ſecluſion from the world, were originally derived.

Pythagoras ſaid that 'contemplative 'wiſdom cannot be completely attained 'without a total abſtraction from the or-'dinary affairs of life, and a perfect tran-'quility and freedom of mind.' But the later Platoniſts, among whom we might expect the moſt advanced and improved ſtate of philoſophy, carried theſe ideas ſtill farther. 'They practiſed the moſt 'rigorous abſtinence, as by this means 'they expected to purify themſelves from 'moral defilement, and they paſſed whole 'days and nights in contemplation, and 'what they called devotion. Plotinus 'had ſuch a contempt for the body, that

'he

'he never could be prevailed upon to 'make uſe of any means to cure the diſ-'eaſes to which his conſtitution was ſub-'ject, or to alleviate his pain. His rigo-'rous abſtinence, and determined neglect 'of his health, at laſt brought him into a 'ſtate of diſeaſe and infirmity, which ren-'dered the latter part of his life extremely 'painful.' In Chriſtians this would be laughed at, but in this deep philoſopher, it may perhaps be admired.

To this ſuperſtition theſe philoſophers joined the moſt extravagant enthuſiaſm. They ſuppoſed, that 'the ſoul of man, 'prepared by previous diſcipline, might 'riſe to a capacity of holding immediate 'intercourſe with good demons, and even 'to enjoy in ecſtaſy an intuitive viſion of 'God himſelf,' a degree of perfection and felicity which ſome of the more eminent among them, ſuch as Plotinus, Porphyry, Jamblicus, and Proclus, were ſuppoſed actually to have attained. Plotinus is ſaid 'to have aſcended through all the Platonic 'ſteps of contemplation, to the actual vi-

'ſion

'ſion of the Supreme Being himſelf, and 'to have been admitted to ſuch inter-'courſe with him as no other philoſopher 'ever enjoyed." Porphyry ſays that he 'himſelf, in the ſixty-eighth year of his 'age, was in a ſacred ecſtaſy, when he 'ſaw the ſupreme intellignece, the god,' he ſays, 'who is ſuperior to all gods, with-'out an image.'

According to Jamblicus, 'the human 'ſoul has an innate knowledge of God, 'prior to all reaſoning, in conſequence of 'its having originally derived its eſſence 'from, and having ſubſiſted in, the divine 'nature; that by the intervention of de-'mons, it enjoys communication with 'the ſuperior divinities, and with God 'himſelf. Gods, demons, and heroes,' he ſays, 'appear to men under various 'forms, in dreams, or waking viſions, to 'render them bodily or ſpiritual ſervices, 'and to enable them to predict future 'events. But theſe communications with 'the divine nature are not to be obtained 'without the obſervance of certain ſacred

rites,

'rites. The ſigns of divine communica-
'tions,' he ſays, 'are a temporary ſuſpen-
'ſion of the ſenſes and faculties, the inter-
'ruption of the ordinary functions of
'life, and a capacity of ſpeaking and do-
'ing wonders, ſo that in this ſtate the per-
'ſon does not live an animal, or human,
'but a divine life.'

Jews and Chriſtians are reproached for their credulity, for their faith in miracles, however well atteſted; but can they ſay that theſe Platoniſts were leſs credulous? 'With a view to deſtroy the credit which 'the Chriſtian religion derived from mira-
'cles, or at leaſt to advance their philoſo-
'phy to a level with it, they pretended to
'a power of performing ſupernatural ope-
'rations, by the aid of inviſible beings,
'and ſaid that the miracles of Chriſt,' which they did not deny, 'were wrought
'by the ſame magical, or as they termed
'them, *theurgic* powers, which they them-
'ſelves poſſeſſed. The emperor Julian,
'made great uſe of magical arts in exe-
'cuting his political purpoſes. While he

'reported

'was at Vienna, he reported that in the 'middle of the night, he was visited by 'a celestial form, which, speaking in heroic 'verse, had promised him the possession 'of the imperial dignity.

With these facts before us, and many more of the same kind might have been adduced, surely Christianity will no longer be exclusively taxed with superstition, enthusiasm, or credulity. But no countenance is given to these idle notions, or absurd practices, in the scriptures. Christ and the apostles were not monks, nor had they any monkish ideas. Their piety was perfectly rational, and their love of God evidenced by benevolence to man. And they inculcated no austerity, or mortification, besides that temperance, which is opposed to vicious excess, and contributes to the true enjoyment of life.

On the whole, we may surely say that, had modern unbelievers found in the scriptures any of the doctrines which I have shewn to have been professed by the philosophers of antiquity, had they found there

the doctrine of two coeternal principles, that of the emanation of all ſouls from the ſubſtance of the ſupreme Being, the abſorption of them into it again, with their repeated emiſſions and retractions to all eternity; had they found there the doctrine of the formation of all things by the fortuitous concourſe of atoms, that the air is filled with demons of different characters, directing the affairs of the world at their pleaſure, and giving intimations of future events by omens and divination; had they found in the ſcriptures the doctrine of the pre-exiſtence of all human ſouls, their lapſe into groſs bodies, where they are confined, and alſo contaminated by their connection with ſo debaſing a companion, the purification of theſe embodied ſouls by auſterity and mortification, their tranſmigration through the bodies of animals, by way of preparation for their aſcent to the empyreal regions; had they there found the doctrine of one common principle of intelligence, or ſoul of the univerſe, in all men and animals, without

giving

giving to each a permanent exiſtence, had all or any of theſe doctrines been found in the ſcriptures, would they not have exclaimed againſt ſuch crude notions, and wild conceptions, and have rejected the ſyſtem without farther examination? It was, in fact, the finding no ſuch opinions as theſe in the ſcriptures, that firſt led Chriſtian philoſophers, (after having adopted ſeveral of them from a heathen ſource, and having long endeavoured to hold them in conjunction with their chriſtian principles) that led them to ſuſpect their truth; and farther reflection on the ſubject led many to explode them altogether. Thus is the world indebted to Chriſtianity for the detection of errors which were the diſgrace of human reaſon, though patronized by the moſt eminent philoſophers of the heathen world; yet modern unbelievers, though lying, with the reſt of the world, under ſo great obligations to chriſtianity, are now buſily aſſaulting it with every weapon of reaſon or ridicule. Its friends, however, are under no appre-

henſions about it. This very ſtate of things was foreſeen, and foretold, by its founder. Revealed religion is ſo far from ſhrinking from, that it invites, the ſtricteſt examination. Its friends being thoſe of reaſon and truth, engage in its vindication only as ſupported by reaſon and truth, and as favourable to the beſt intereſts of mankind.

DISCOURSE IX.

The evidence of the Moſaic and Chriſtian Religions.

PART I.

God, who, at ſundry times, and in divers manners, ſpake in time paſt unto the fathers, by the prophets, hath, in theſe laſt days, ſpoken unto us by his ſon.

HEB. i. 1--2.

IN the preceding Diſcourſes I have endeavoured to prepare the way for the proper evidence of revealed religion, by explaining the nature, and ſhewing the importance, of the ſubject, and by exhibiting a comparative view of the heathen religions, and that of the Hebrews, which is that branch of revealed religion which is moſt objected to by unbelievers. The ſyſtems of the heathen religions, eſpecially thoſe

thoſe of remote ages, coeval with the Moſaic inſtitutions, you have ſeen to have been not only a confuſed maſs of miſerable ſuperſtition, ariſing from a total ignorance of the laws of nature, but to have conſiſted in rites ſhocking to humanity, good morals, and common decency, and that they were, in a great meaſure, the cauſe of the horrid depravity of manners which prevailed in the Gentile world. On the contrary, the tenets of the religion of the Hebrews, which has been ſo much decried by Voltaire and others, were, in the higheſt degree, rational, worthy of the Supreme Being, leading to the greateſt purity of heart and life, and peculiarly calculated to counteract the effects of the abſurd and miſchievous religions of the neighbouring nations. Being, therefore, ſo much ſuperior to, and reverſe of, all the forms of religions, with which Moſes or any of his countrymen, could have been acquainted, and even ſuperior, as I have ſhewn, to the principles advanced by the moſt celebrated of the heathen philoſophers,

phers, there is the greateſt antecedent probability that it came from God, the fountain of wiſdom; who thought proper to make choice of one nation, in which to preſerve the true knowledge and worſhip of himſelf, amidſt the general defection from it, and by that means to diffuſe, in due time, the moſt ſalutary light to all his offspring of mankind. And it has already, in a great meaſure, effected this benevolent purpoſe, in the gradual unfolding of the plan, in the Chriſtian revelation, which has a conſtant reference to that of Moſes; ſo that they are to be conſidered as parts of the ſame ſcheme; the proper evidence of which I ſhall now proceed to lay before you. In order to do this as briefly as poſſible, I ſhall not conſider the evidence of each ſeparately, but jointly; eſpecially as I have done the former, and more in detail, in another ſet of diſcourſes, which are already before the Public.

I ſhall begin with obſerving that the only proper evidence of the interpoſition

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of God, as the author of nature, is an exhibition of ſomething which he alone is capable of performing, that is, a proper *miracle*, or a controlling of the order of nature, which it muſt be allowed that no other than he who eſtabliſhed it, and who conſtantly maintains it, can do. The medium of divine communications may be *men*, and where the inſtruction and reformation of men is the object, it is moſt naturally and properly ſo; but the power by which it is effected, muſt appear to be of God. Otherwiſe, there would be no reaſon to ſuppoſe that there was any thing ſuperhuman in the ſcheme.

It has, indeed, been the opinion of ſome, that proper miracles may be wrought by beings ſuperior to man, though inferior to the Supreme God, and even for purpoſes oppoſite to any that could be *his*, tending to miſlead and injure mankind. But this is an opinion which I am perſuaded will not be ſeriouſly maintained by any perſon at this day. It cannot, with any appearance

of

of reaſon, be ſuppoſed, that the Supreme Being would put it in the power of any malevolent demon (ſuppoſing ſuch beings to exiſt) thus to deceive his creatures, and without reſerving to himſelf the power of undeceiving them. For if ſuch beings as theſe were permitted to work real miracles, or perform ſuch works as men were unable to diſtinguiſh from real miracles, it was all that himſelf could do; ſo that the miſchief would be without remedy.

We muſt, therefore, take it for granted, and I doubt not, it will be univerſally allowed, that if there be a real departure from the order or laws of nature (which in the greater inſtances there is no danger of miſtaking) it muſt be by the interpoſition of a power properly *divine*, and for a purpoſe worthy of divinity, of the great and good parent of the human race; for inſtance, to give them ſeaſonable aſſiſtance in the diſcovery of intereſting truth, and removing the cauſes of error, vice, and miſery, which muſt otherwiſe have remained without remedy.

Miracles,

Miracles, then, being allowed to be the only, but a ſufficient, evidence of divine interpoſition, it will be aſked, what is the evidence of their having been wrought, to thoſe who are not themſelves witneſſes of them? For it is not pretended that miracles are exhibited before all perſons, but only occaſionally. I anſwer, the teſtimony of thoſe who *were* properly witneſſes of them, but teſtimony ſo circumſtanced, that the ſuppoſition of its being falſe would be more improbable on the whole than that of its being true; ſo that its being falſe ſhall, by a fair eſtimate, appear to be a greater miracle, or a greater deviation from the uſual courſe of nature, than what is related as ſuch. And certainly ſuch caſes may be ſuppoſed.

If, for inſtance, a great number of perſons, univerſally allowed to have the uſe of their ſenſes and underſtanding, ſeriouſly declare that they actually ſaw, or heard, any thing whatever, though *a priori* ever ſo improbable, and their *veracity* be

not

not queſtioned, their ſenſes muſt have been under a miraculous illuſion, if the thing be not as they repreſent it. It will alſo be allowed, from the opinion generally entertained of human nature, that circumſtances may be ſuppoſed, in which a great number of perſons agreeing to tell a falſehood, when they could not have any motive to do it, would be deemed nothing leſs than miraculous.

It is readily acknowledged, that miracles not being events of daily or frequent occurrence, require more definite evidence than ordinary facts, and this in proportion to their antecedent improbability, ariſing from their want of analogy to events that are common. But there is no fact that is poſſible in itſelf, but the evidence *may* be ſuch as to make it credible. The circumſtances which tend to give credit to human teſtimony with reſpect to miracles, are the following. The witneſſes muſt be in ſufficient number. They muſt be in circumſtances in which they cannot be deceived themſelves, and they muſt have no apparent

rent motive to deceive others. In order to this, the miracles muſt be in ſufficient number, and exhibited ſo long, as to afford opportunity for examining them. They muſt alſo be upon a large ſcale, or of ſuch a nature as to exclude all idea of trick or impoſition. They muſt be exhibited before perſons who had no previous diſpoſition to expect or to receive them. A ſufficient degree of attention muſt be excited to them at the time, and a number of perſons muſt be intereſted in aſcertaining their reality. The hiſtory of them muſt be coeval with the events, and the belief of them muſt produce a laſting effect.

If all theſe circumſtances ſhould be found to concur in the miracles recorded in the ſcriptures, it muſt be allowed that they have all the credibility that facts ſo extraordinary, and of ſo great antiquity *can* have, and nothing more can be required in the caſe. The moſt ſceptical of men cannot demand more ſatisfactory evidence. I ſhall therefore now proceed to

conſider

conſider how far theſe circumſtances apply to the miracles of which an account is contained in the Old and New Teſtament. For it is the truth of the ſyſtem of religion propoſed to us in theſe books that is to be proved by them.

I muſt, however, remind you, that though I would by no means crave your indulgence in being ſatisfied with a ſmall degree of evidence, or leſs than ſuch as I have deſcribed, the thing to be proved is far from being improbable *a priori*, ſo as to make ſuch extraordinary evidence neceſſary. If men, who are the offspring of God, were involved in error, vice, and miſery, from which it was not in their power to reſcue themſelves, it might even have been *expected* that their benevolent parent would provide ſome effectual means for their relief. And the ſcheme of revelation, which gives men the fulleſt information concerning the being, the perfections and the providence of God, concerning man's duty here, and a future ſtate of retribution hereafter, the knowledge of which

which we have ſeen the wiſeſt of men never attained of themſelves, is excellently adapted to anſwer this end, and therefore it is not only deſirable, but far from being improbable. On the contrary, I have ſhewn at large that the plan of revelation is, in a variety of reſpects, the moſt natural and the moſt effectual, and conſequently the moſt eligible, mode of communicating religious inſtruction to men.

In this, however, I ſpeak to the feelings of the virtuous, the worthy, and the thinking part of mankind, thoſe whoſe characters and conduct are ſuch as will naturally lead them to wiſh for, and rejoice in, the diſcovery of ſuch momentous truths, and not the profligate and thoughtleſs, who are governed by mere appetite and paſſion, like the brutes, who, looking no farther than to mere animal enjoyments, never think of a God, of a providence, or a future ſtate at all; and who, if it depended upon them, would not chuſe that there ſhould be any ſuch thing.

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It is well known that there are ſtates of mind in which no attention will be given to any thing that is offenſive to it. A philoſopher of great eminence, having advanced an opinion concerning ſomething that might be determined by a microſcopical obſervation, refuſed to look through a microſcope that was brought to him, with the object ready prepared, when he was told that the inſpection would refute his hypotheſis. And certainly vicious propenſities lay a ſtronger bias on the mind than any ſpeculative opinions whatever.

In minds exceedingly debaſed, there muſt be an almoſt invincible bias againſt the doctrines of revelation; and probably the evidence even of their own ſenſes would not be ſufficient to convince them. To ſuch perſons as theſe, I do not addreſs myſelf at all, becauſe it would be altogether in vain. Indeed I can hardly ſuppoſe that any motive, even that of curioſity, would bring any perſon of this character to hear me on the ſubject, and

therefore

therefore I will not ſuppoſe any ſuch to be preſent.

1. To thoſe perſons whoſe minds are not abſolutely ſhut againſt conviction, I would obſerve, in the firſt place, that the miracles recorded in the ſcriptures, and on which the truth of the Moſaic and Chriſtian inſtitutions reſts, are ſufficiently *numerous*. Paſſing over all that preceded the age of Moſes himſelf, the miracles which effected the emancipation of the Iſraelites from their bondage in Egypt, and their ſettlement in the land of Canaan, will certainly be allowed not to have been deficient with reſpect to *number*, whatever elſe be objected to them. They began with the miraculous appearance of fire, in a buſh which was not conſumed by it, the withering and reſtoring of Moſes' arm, and the changing his rod into a ſerpent, and that ſerpent into a rod as at firſt. Then follow the ten great plagues of Egypt, beginning with the changing of the waters of the river into blood, and ending

ending with the death of all the firſt born of the Egyptians in one night, according to the prediction of Moſes. We then proceed to the paſſage of the red ſea, while the waters roſe on each ſide to admit of it; the ſweetning of the waters of Mara, the delivery of the ten commandments in an articulate voice from mount Sinai, the ſupplying of the whole nation with manna, and the conducting of them with the appearance of a pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night during forty years, the drawing water from a rock, enough to ſupply the whole nation, at two different times, the death of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram by the opening of the earth at the word of Moſes, the death of Nadab and Alihu, the two ſons of Aaron, by fire from heaven, the paſſage of the river Jordan, by the dividing of its waters, the fall of the walls of Jericho, and ſome others of leſs conſequence, all in the compaſs of one generation.

In the ſubſequent hiſtory of the Iſraelites, miracles were not ſo numerous, but

it is probable that no long period of it was intirely without them, till they were diſcontinued after the Babyloniſh captivity. But in this interval the Hebrew prophets foretold in the plaineſt language many future events which came to paſs in their own times, or very near to them, and among theſe the fate of all the neighbouring nations, as well as of their own, to the lateſt period of time. Jeremiah foretold not only the Babyloniſh captivity, but the exact duration of it. In the time of Daniel we have the deliverance of Shadrach, Meſhach and Abednego from the fiery furnace, of Daniel himſelf in the den of lions, and his foretelling the inſanity (for ſuch it muſt have been) of Nebuchadnezar, and his reſtoration after ſeven years, as well as his prophecies concerning the riſe and fall of the four great monarchies, which have been wonderfully verified, though part of them yet remain to be fulfilled.

After this we have an interval of about four hundred years, in which we find no pretenſions to miracles, or prophecy. But during the public miniſtry of Jeſus, miracles

cles were more numerous than they had ever been before. His divine miſſion was announced three times by articulate voices from heaven, he cured the diſeaſes, however obſtinate, of all who applied to him, and ſome when he was at a diſtance, and he raiſed at leaſt three perſons from a ſtate of death. He twice fed ſeveral thouſand perſons with a ſmall quantity of proviſions, he alſo changed a large quantity of water into wine. He ſtilled a tempeſt at a word, he walked on the ſea, and cauſed a fig-tree to wither by only ſpeaking, he foretold the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the temple, and the deſolation of the country, to come to paſs, in that generation; he roſe from the dead after being publicly crucified, and viſibly aſcended to heaven.

Miracles not leſs conſiderable than theſe diſtinguiſhed the miniſtry of the apoſtles, who ſucceeded Jeſus. They not only expreſſed themſelves in languages which they had never learned, but imparted this power to all the converts; they healed many ſick perſons, they even raiſed the dead,

and foretold ſeveral future events, which came to paſs in their own time. If any perſon will ſay that theſe miracles (and many are omitted in this general view) are not ſufficiently numerous for the purpoſe for which they were wrought, he would ſay that no *number* whatever would be ſufficient, and therefore his objection would not be to the *number*, as ſuch, but muſt be of ſome different kind, which will be conſidered under ſome of the following heads.

2. Many of the miracles recorded in the ſcriptures, were on ſo large a ſcale, or on other accounts of ſuch a nature, that there could be no ſuſpicion of trick or deception, with reſpect to them. If the *appearances* only exiſted (and with reſpect to them, the ſenſes of men could not be deceived) the *cauſe* was indiſputable. And ſuch were almoſt all the miracles exhibited in Egypt, as the changing of all the water of ſuch a river as the Nile, as large as any in this country, into blood, or any thing like blood, ſo that no uſe could be made

of

of it; and this not momentarily, but for a conſiderable time, and yet an evil of this magnitude was removed at the prayer of Moſes. Perſons ſkilled in tricks of ſlight of hand, which was, no doubt, the caſe of the magicians of Egypt, might impoſe upon a company, even of intelligent and quick ſighted perſons, not uſed to them, and on Moſes himſelf, with a ſmall quantity of water, contained in a baſon, or they might dexterouſly ſubſtitute a ſerpent in the place of a rod, or a rod in the place of a ſerpent; but the miracles exhibited by Moſes, convinced even the magicians themſelves, that what he did was by the *finger* of *God*, as they expreſſed themſelves.

The plague of frogs, that of the lice, (as our tranſlation renders the word,) of the murrain among the cattle, of the boils, of the hail, of the locuſts, and of the darkneſs, might each of them ſeparately, have been produced by natural cauſes. But that they ſhould all be announced before hand, that none of them ſhould affect the diſtrict occupied by the Iſraelites, which adjoined to the

the reſt of Egypt, and that they ſhould all be removed at the prayer of Moſes, are undeniable evidences that the hand of God was in them. Still more was this evident in the death of the firſt-born, and of the firſt-born only, of man and of beaſt, through all the country, while not one of the Iſraelites died. By this diſplay of divine power, Pharaoh and all the Egyptians were ſo terrified and ſubdued, that, unwilling as they before had been, to part with ſuch uſeful ſervants, they *were* now deſirous of getting rid of them, at any rate.

Upon a greater ſcale ſtill, was the paſſage of the whole nation of Iſraelites, though not fewer than two millions of people, marching at their leiſure, with all their cattle and baggage, through an arm of the red ſea, while the water roſe on each ſide of them, and all the Egyptians who had ventured to follow them were drowned. There could be no impoſition on the ſenſes in ſuch a ſcene as this, or in the ſimilar miracle of the paſſage of the river Jordan, in the ſame manner. The ſame may be ſaid of other miraculous

miraculous appearances in the time of Moſes, eſpecially that of the delivery of the ten commandments in an articulate voice, heard by all the Iſraelites, then, as I obſerved, more than two millions of people, from mount Sinai, in a river, (for it could not be leſs) iſſuing from a rock, at the word of Moſes; for the blow of his ſtaff could not have had any ſuch effect, and the deſcent of the manna every morning, with the remarkable and conſtant exception of one particular day in the ſeven, on which no manna fell, for the ſpace of forty years, and the pillar of a cloud by day and of fire by night, which alſo attended them the ſame time, and directed all their marches. He muſt have been a bold impoſtor, indeed, who ſhould have attempted any thing of this kind, and not ſo reluctant and ſo timid a leader as Moſes evidently was.

Among the miracles which were on ſo large a ſcale as to exclude all idea of deception, I may mention the falling down of the walls of Jericho, on the ark being carried

carried round the place ſeven times, the falling down of the idol Dagon, in the preſence of the ark, the calamities which befel the cities of the Philiſtines, to which it was ſent, and the circumſtances of its conveyance back into the land of Canaan, viz. in a carriage drawn by cows whoſe calves were kept at home.

Of the miracles that come under this claſs, was the ſtrength imparted to Sampſon, by which he was able to take down the gates of a city, and carry them to the top of a hill, and after loſing his ſtrength, his recovering it again, ſo as to pull down the building in which were aſſembled all the lords of the Philiſtines, when they were all killed. Such alſo was the burning of the ſacrifice of Elijah, on mount Carmel, while the prieſts of Baal attempted the ſame in vain, he being alone, and they four hundred men, favoured by an idolatrous king, who was himſelf preſent, and the people in general alſo favouring them. I might add, under this head, ſeveral other miracles recorded in the Old Teſtament,

and

and muſt not omit to mention in this view alſo, the caſe of Shadrach, Meſhach, and Abednego, who were preſerved unhurt in the fiery furnace at Babylon, and alſo the delivery of Daniel from the lions, in the ſame city.

The miracles recorded in the New Teſtament are not, in general, on ſo large a ſcale as many of thoſe recited in the Old, but they are ſufficiently ſo to be out of the reach of any charge of trick and impoſition. Such were the cures performed by Jeſus, of ſuch diſeaſes as, though ſometimes curable by medical treatment, always require a long time; whereas his cures were always inſtantaneous, and yet complete. Such were his cures of blindneſs, eſpecially of the man who was born blind, of fevers, which are never cured but by coming to a certain criſis, of leproſy, of the dropſy; and eſpecially of infanity, called the caſting out of demons, the ſuppoſed cauſe of that diſorder. Of this claſs, more eſpecially, was his raiſing to life, the daughter of Jairus, at Capernaum, the widow's ſon at Nain,

Nain, and of Lazarus at Bethany. Of miracles of this claſs, were his feeding firſt five thouſand, and afterwards four thouſand perſons, with a few loaves and fiſhes, his ſtilling a tempeſt, his walking on the ſea, and a ſtormy ſea, and laſtly his reſurrection and aſcenſion.

In the hiſtory of the apoſtles, the miracles of this claſs are thoſe called *the gift of tongues*, by which thouſands of perſons were enabled to expreſs themſelves in languages which they had not learned, the cure of the beggar who was known to have been lame from his birth, at the gate of the temple, the deliverance of Peter and John, and afterwards of Peter only, out of priſon, when every precaution had been taken to ſecure them, and alſo the cure of many diſeaſes by Peter and others, ſimilar to the cures performed by Jeſus. Several other miracles might be mentioned under this head, but theſe are abundantly ſufficient for the purpoſe, that is, they were appearances with reſpect to which there could not have been

been any deception. Perſons who were preſent, could never have been under any miſtake with reſpect to the *facts*, and the facts were of ſuch a nature, that they muſt neceſſarily have been miraculous, how ignorant ſoever we may be of the powers, or laws, of nature in other reſpects.

3. Many of the miracles recorded in the ſcriptures, and almoſt all thoſe that are mentioned under the preceding head, were performed in the preſence of a great number of perſons. At the miracles performed by Moſes, all the inhabitants of Egypt, and the whole nation of Iſraelites, were preſent. All the latter muſt have ſeen every thing that paſſed in the wilderneſs. The whole nation paſſed through the river Jordan, and ſaw the falling of the walls of Jericho. The whole nation of the Philiſtines could not but know of the triumph of the ark of God over their idol Dagon, and the manner in which it was conveyed back to the land of Canaan. Ahab and his court, and no doubt thouſands of the common

common people, were preſent at Elijah's ſacrifice. Nebuchadnezzar, and all the people of Babylon, muſt have known of the deliverance of Shadrach, Meſhach, and Abednego, and ſo muſt Darius, and all people in his time, the deliverance of Daniel from the lions.

With reſpect to the miracles of Jeſus, it is evident from the nature of them, and from his manner of life, that they could not but have been known to the whole nation of the Jews. Peter, ſpeaking of them to a promiſcuous multitude who were aſſembled in Jeruſalem on the report of the wonderful gift of tongues, expreſſed himſelf in the following remarkable manner, Acts ii. 22, *Ye men of Iſrael, hear my words, Jeſus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and ſigns, which God did by him, in the midſt of you, as ye yourſelves alſo know.* Again, addreſſing himſelf to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and his friends, he ſays, concerning Jeſus, and the goſpel, Acts, x. 36. *The word which God ſent unto the children of Iſrael, that*

that word ye know, which was publiſhed throughout all Judea. He evidently did not think it neceſſary to produce witneſſes of particular facts. He took it for granted that they were known to every body, *how God anointed Jeſus of Nazareth with the holy ſpirit, and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppreſſed of the devil, for God was with him; and we are witneſſes of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jeruſalem.*

Alſo, when Paul was addreſſing king Agrippa, in the preſence of Feſtus, and the court, he ſays, Acts xxvi. 20, *None of theſe things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.* To the reſurrection and the aſcenſion of Jeſus, all the country, but for the beſt reaſons, were not witneſſes. But certainly five hundred who ſaw him at one time, were abundantly ſufficient to aſcertain the fact, as far as any number could do it.

The miracle of the gift of tongues, conferred on the apoſtles, and all the primitive Chriſtians, could not but be known

known to all the country, and in every place in which it was conferred. The cure of the lame beggar at the gate of the temple, was, from the circumſtances of it, as public as any thing of the kind could well be, and the deliverance of Peter and John from priſon, when the court and all the people knew of their commitment, and were in expectation of their being produced, muſt have engaged univerſal attention. Paul was a perſon ſo well known to the chief prieſts, and ſo active in the perſecution of the Chriſtians, that the circomſtances of his converſion were, no doubt, the ſubject of much converſation, and the miracles that he performed in ſtriking Elymas with blindneſs in the preſence of the governor of Cyprus, the cure of the lame man at Lyſtra, for which the people would have ſacrificed to him as to a god, his cure of the inſane woman at Theſſalonica, and of the demoniacs at Epheſus, were of the moſt conſpicuous nature.

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4. The miracles recorded in the ſcriptures, eſpecially the great ones which attended the promulgation of the law of Moſes, and of Chriſtianity, were all performed in the preſence of enemies, at leaſt of perſons not at all prediſpoſed to believe them, or to be convinced by them. It appears that Moſes himſelf, who had reſided forty years in Arabia, and was married, and had ſettled there, was exceedingly averſe to undertake any thing in favour of his countrymen, and that they, ſeeing no remedy, had acquieſced in their ſtate of ſervitude; but that his reluctance was overcome by miracles, and the poſitive command of God.

In his expoſtulation with God on the ſubject, he expreſſed the unwillingneſs of his countrymen to believe his miſſion. On the ſight of the miracles which he was impowered to work in their preſence, they were ſatisfied with reſpect to it, but their deliverance not being effected immediately, and their ſervitude being rendered more galling, they conceived great indignation

dignation againſt Moſes and Aaron, for attempting it. We read Exod. v. 20. *And they met Moſes and Aaron, who ſtood in the way, as they came forth from Pharoah, and they ſaid unto them, the Lord look upon you, and judge, becauſe you have made our ſavour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharoah, and in the eyes of his ſervants, to put a ſword into their hands to ſlay us.* Moſes himſelf at this time repented of his undertaking. For we read, v. 22. *And Moſes returned unto the Lord, and ſaid, wherefore haſt thou ſo evil intreated this people? Why is it that thou haſt ſent me, for ſince I came to Pharoah to ſpeak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people, neither haſt thou delivered thy people at all.* On this Moſes received farther encouragement, but when he ſpake to his countrymen again, chap. ix. *they hearkened not unto him, for anguiſh of ſpirit, and for cruel bondage.*

When, in conſequence of a ſeries of miracles, of the moſt aſtoniſhing kind, the deliverance of the Iſraelites was actually effected, and they had marched out of the country, on perceiving that they were

were purſued, they were exceedingly alarmed, and ſaid unto Moſes, Exod. xiv. 11. *Becauſe there were no graves in Egypt, haſt thou taken us away to die in the wilderneſs? Wherefore haſt thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt? ſaying, Let us alone that we may ſerve the Egyptians. For it had been better for us to ſerve the Egyptians, than that we ſhould die in the wilderneſs.* It was almoſt with as much reluctance that the Iſraelites were induced to leave Egypt as the Egyptians expreſſed to let them go. On every adverſe event, or hardſhip, we find them making the ſame complaints, and regretting that they had left Egypt.

Thus, when they wanted water, we read, Exod. xvii. 3. *The people murmured againſt Moſes, and ſaid, wherefore is it that thou haſt brought us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children, and our cattle with thirſt. And Moſes cried unto the Lord ſaying, what ſhall I do unto this people, they be almoſt ready to ſtone me.* Finding no fleſh meat in the wilderneſs, they again repented that they

had left Egypt, Num. xi. 4. *They wept ſaying, Who ſhall give us fleſh to eat. We remember the fiſh that we did eat freely in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now is our ſoul dried away. There is nothing at all but this manna before our eyes.*

On the unfavourable report of the ſpies, who had been ſent to explore the land of Canaan, we read, Num. xiv. 2. *All the children of Iſrael murmured againſt Moſes and againſt Aaron, and the whole congregation ſaid unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt, or would God that we had died in the wilderneſs; and wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land to fall by the ſword, that our wives and our children ſhould be a prey. Were it not better for us to return to Egypt.* Again, when they wanted water, after paſſing forty years in the wilderneſs, and been maintained by miracle all that time, we read, chap. xx. 2. *they gathered themſelves together againſt Moſes, and againſt Aaron, and the people chode with Moſes, and the people ſaid, Would God we had died when our*

our brethren died before the Lord, and why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderneſs, that we and our cattle ſhould die there; and wherefore have ye made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of ſeed, or of figs, or vines, or pomegranates, neither is there any water to drink. Laſtly, When Arad the Canaanite fell upon them, and took ſome priſoners, we read, Numb. xxi. 4. *the ſouls of the people were much diſcouraged, becauſe of the way, and the people ſpake againſt God and againſt Moſes, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt, to die in the wilderneſs; for there is no bread, neither is there any water, and our ſoul loatheth this light bread.*

As to the religion which Moſes preſcribed to this people, there is the moſt abundant and indiſputable evidence of their having been very far indeed from having had any predilection for it. On the contrary, they from the firſt diſcovered a diſlike for it, and took every opportunity of deſerting it, and revolting to the more al-

luring rites of the neighbouring nations; and ſuch as, no doubt, they had been accuſtomed to, and been fond of, in Egypt. But as this is a ſubject of the greateſt importance, I ſhall defer enlarging upon it to the next opportunity.

DISCOURSE X.

The evidence of the Moſaic and Chriſtian Religions.

PART II.

God, who, at ſundry times, and in divers manners, ſpake in time paſt unto the fathers, by the prophets, hath, in theſe laſt days, ſpoken unto us by his ſon.

HEB. i. 1--2.

IN my laſt Diſcourſe, I obſerved that the only proper evidence of divine revelation, is the exhibition of ſomething to which divine power alone is equal, or proper *miracles*, and that theſe, not being analogous to common events, are, on that account, improbable, *a priori*, and therefore require more definite evidence, though there is nothing that is poſſible in itſelf, but may be proved to have taken place by human

human teſtimony. And I farther obſerved, that all that the moſt ſceptical perſons could require in the caſe, were the following circumſtances, viz. that the miracles muſt be in ſufficient number, and alſo exhibited ſo long, as to afford ſufficient opportunity to conſider and examine them. They muſt be on ſo large a ſcale, or otherwiſe of ſuch a nature, as to exclude all ſuſpicion of trick and impoſition; they muſt be exhibited before perſons who had no previous diſpoſition to expect or believe them; a great degree of attention muſt be excited to them at the time, and a ſufficient number of perſons muſt be intereſted to aſcertain their reality, while the events were recent; the hiſtory of them muſt be coeval with the events, and the belief of them muſt have produced a laſting effect.

Three of the firſt mentioned of theſe circumſtances I have already ſhewn are found in the miracles recorded in the ſcriptures, and with reſpect to the next, I have ſhewn that the Hebrew nation was ſufficiently

ſufficiently indiſpoſed to believe the divine miſſion of Moſes in general, and I ſhall proceed to ſhow that they were more particularly indiſpoſed to receive the *religion* which he preſented to them, and which it was the great object of all the miracles to eſtabliſh. So far, I have obſerved, were they from being prediſpoſed to receive and embrace it, that from the very firſt they diſcovered a diſlike of it, and took every opportunity of deſerting it, and revolting to the more alluring rites of the neighbouring nations, and this diſpoſition continued more than a thouſand years.

Upon Moſes's ſtaying in the mount longer than the people expected, and thinking they ſhould hear no more of him (for he had been abſent forty days, and where he could not find any ſuſtenance) we read Ex. xxxii. 1. *the people gathered themſelves together unto Aaron, and ſaid unto him, Up make us gods that ſhall go before us. For as for this Moſes, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.* After this, they made a golden calf, built

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an altar before it, offered burnt offerings, and peace offerings, when the *people ſat down to eat and drink, and roſe up to play*, no doubt in the licentious manner in which the religious feſtivals of the Egyptians were conducted.

A ſevere judgment, and the return of Moſes, brought them back to the new religion. But after they had paſſed forty years in the wilderneſs, in which they had no opportunity of ſhewing their diſpoſition, on coming into the neighbourhood of the Moabites and Medianites, we read Numb. xxv. 1. *the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab, and they called the people to the ſacrifices of their gods, and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods, and Iſrael joined himſelf unto Baal Peor.* Another heavy judgment recovered them from this defection, but it is not probable that any reaſoning, or expoſtulation, would have done it.

The miraculous paſſage of the river Jordan, the falling down of the walls of Jericho, and their conquering the warlike inhabitants of Canaan, devoted to the wor-

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ſhip of idols, ſatisfied the Iſraelites that their God was ſuperior to the gods of that country, and therefore we read Joſh. xxiv. 31. that *Iſrael ſerved the Lord all the days of Joſhua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joſhua, who had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Iſrael.* But the very next generation ſhewed a different diſpoſition. For we read Jud. ii. 10. *when that generation was gathered to their fathers, there aroſe another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Iſrael; and the children of Iſrael did evil in the ſight of the Lord, and ſerved Baalim, and they forſook the Lord god of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people who were round about them, and bowed themſelves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger, and they forſook the Lord, and ſerved Baal and Aſhtaroth.*

The hiſtory of this people, till the time of Samuel, is nothing but a repetition of revolts, and puniſhments for them, by the invaſion and oppreſſion of ſome neighbouring

ing nation. *When they repented*, as we read Jud. ii. 16. *the Lord raiſed up judges, who delivered them out of the hand of thoſe that ſpoiled them, and yet they would not hearken unto their judges; but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themſelves unto them. They turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord, but they did not ſo. And when the Lord raiſed them up judges, then was the Lord with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies, all the days of the judge. And it came to paſs when that judge was dead, that they returned and corrupted themſelves more than their fathers, in following other gods, to ſerve them, and to bow down unto them. They ceaſed not from their own doings, and from their ſtubborn way. And the anger of the Lord was hot againſt Iſrael, and he ſaid, Becauſe this people has tranſgreſſed my covenant, which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice, I alſo will not henceforth drive out any from before them, of the nations which Joſhua left when he died, that through them I may prove Iſrael, whether they will keep the way of the Lord, to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not.*

For

For theſe revolts they were reduced into ſervitude, firſt by Cuſhan-riſhathaim, king of Meſopotamia, from whoſe power they were reſcued by Othniel, then by the king of Moab, from whom they were delivered by Ehud; then by the Philiſtines, when they were delivered by Shamgar. From Jabin king of Canaan, they were delivered by Deborah and Barak; from the Midianites by Gideon, from the Ammonites by Jephtha, from the Philiſtines a ſecond time, in part by Samſon, but more completely by Saul and David, under whom the worſhip of Jehovah was rendered triumphant; and in that ſtate it continued till the latter end of the reign of Solomon, when he had the weakneſs not only to indulge his wives, taken from the neighbouring nations, in the worſhip of the gods of their reſpective countries, but to join them in it.

Notwithſtanding the very flouriſhing ſtate of the affairs of the Iſraelites in the reigns of David and Solomon, which was always in thoſe days, and long afterwards, aſcribed

aſcribed to the power of the gods that they worſhipped, the ten tribes which revolted from the houſe of David, revolted alſo from the religion of Moſes, at firſt indeed by only ſetting up images at Dan and Bethel, in honour of the true God, but afterwards, and eſpecially in the reign of Ahab, worſhipping Baal, and all the hoſt of heaven. And though by the judgment of a three years drought, in which they found that the worſhip of Baal could give them no relief, and the ſeaſonable miracle of Elijah at mount Carmel, they were recovered, at leaſt for ſome time, from this ſpecies of idolatry, they continued to worſhip the calves at Dan and Bethel, till their captivity by the Aſſyrians; when they became ſo mixed and incorporated with other nations, as not to be diſtinguiſhed; and whether they be now diſcovered or not, they are without any badge of their antient religion, to which it is evident they never diſcovered any attachment.

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The kingdom of Judah having the temple within its limits, and other advantages, adhered better to the worſhip of the true God, but with ſeveral remarkable departures from it, as in the reign of Rehoboam the ſon of Solomon, who as we read, 2 Chron. xii. 1. *forſook the law of the Lord, and all Iſrael with him*; in that of Jehoram, the ſon of Jehoſaphat, of Ahaziah, of Joaſh, after the death of the pious high-prieſt Jehoiada, of Ahaz, of Manaſſeh, who made uſe of the temple itſelf, for the worſhip of other gods; and of Amon, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah, whoſe reign was put an end to by Nebuchadnezzar taking Jeruſalem, deſtroying the temple, and carrying the people into captivity to Babylon.

If this hiſtory, of which I have only given a faint outline, do not ſupply ſufficient and redundant evidence of the diſlike which the Iſraelites had to the inſtitutions of Moſes, and conſequently of the reluctance with which they muſt have received, and conformed to them, nothing

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can be proved concerning the diſpoſition and turn of thinking of any people whatever. It cannot, therefore, be denied, that all the miracles wrought to eſtabliſh this religion, and confirm them in it, may be conſidered as exhibited before enemies, perſons prediſpoſed not to receive, but to cavil at, and reject it. This is the more remarkable, as there is no other inſtance in all hiſtory, of any nation voluntarily abandoning the religion of their anceſtors till the promulgation of Chriſtianity, before which they all gradually diſappeared, like clouds before the ſun.

The Babyloniſh captivity having been foretold, together with its exact duration, by the Hebrew prophets, and the overthrow of Babylon, famous for its addictedneſs to idol worſhip, effectually cured thoſe of the Jews who returned to their own country, and no doubt many others, of any diſpoſition to the worſhip of foreign gods, but they were not by this means the more, but in fact, the leſs diſpoſed to receive the miracles of Jeſus.

Indeed

Indeed it is evident that they had not been previouſly diſpoſed to believe any miracles. For before the appearance of Jeſus, there had been no pretenſions to a power of working miracles in the country, a circumſtance which by no means agrees with the charge commonly advanced againſt the Jews as a credulous people. It is well known, however, that when Jeſus appeared, the nation in general, then in a ſtate of ſubjection to the Romans, a ſituation which they ill brooked, were in anxious expectation of the appearance of the Meſſiah announced by their prophets, and who they took for granted, was immediately to aſſume the character of a temporal prince, reſcue them from their ſubjection to the Romans, and give them the dominion of the whole world; and certainly to this character that of Jeſus bore no reſemblance.

Beſides, Jeſus's free cenſure of the prieſts, and leading men in the nation, ſoon made them his moſt bitter enemies. They, ſeeing, that whatever he was, *they* had

had nothing to expect from *him*, ſpared no pains to deſtroy him, and did not reſt till they had actually compaſſed his death. All the miracles of Jeſus, therefore, were exhibited before enemies. Even the moſt virtuous and beſt diſpoſed of the Jews were as much attached to the idea of a temporal prince, for their Meſſiah, as any of their countrymen, ſo that even this part of the nation muſt have been exceedingly indiſpoſed to receive Jeſus in that character; and when they did it, it was with the idea that, though he did not aſſume it *then*, he would at ſome future time. Even after his reſurrection, the apoſtles aſked him whether he would *at that time reſtore the kingdom to Iſrael*, Acts i. 6. and their minds were not fully enlightened on this ſubject till after the deſcent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecoſt.

The reſurrection of Jeſus, though the moſt pleaſing event to all his diſciples, was a thing of which, it it is evident, they had no expectation after his death, ſo that it was not without the greateſt difficulty,

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and the moſt undeniable evidence, that of their own ſenſes, that they were brought to believe it. The manner in which the apoſtle Thomas expreſſed his incredulity on the ſubject, is very remarkable. He was not preſent at the firſt appearance of Jeſus, and when the others, as we read, John xx. 25, ſaid unto him, *We have ſeen the Lord*, he ſaid unto them, *Except I ſee in his hands the prints of his nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thruſt my hand into his ſide, I will not believe.* In this particular, however, Jeſus, the next time that he appeared to his diſciples, gave him the ſatisfaction that he demanded. For *he ſaid to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands, and reach hither thy hand, and thruſt it into my ſide, and be not faithleſs, but believing.* No doubt all the reſt of the apoſtles were at firſt, in the ſame ſtate of mind with reſpect to this event. In this caſe, therefore, even the diſciples of Chriſt, may be conſidered as prejudiced againſt the reception of this great miracle, and are by no means to be chargeable with credulity.

The apoſtles, and all the firſt preachers of chriſtianity, were in the ſame ſituation with reſpect to the great body of the Jews, that Jeſus had been in before them; and nothing could be more violent than the oppoſition they actually met with. One of the moſt remarkable converſions, was that of Paul, and in the hiſtory of it, we ſee, in the ſtrongeſt light, the extreme prejudice which even the better kind of Jews, entertained againſt chriſtianity. Nothing leſs than the appearance of Jeſus himſelf, was able to effect his converſion. Of the miraculous circumſtances attending this converſion, his choſen companions, men who, no doubt, were actuated with as much zeal as himſelf, againſt the new religion, and who probably continued enemies to it, were witneſſes, and to them he afterwards appealed for what they ſaw and heard, viz. a light ſurpaſſing that of the ſun at noon-day; and the ſound of a voice, though they did not diſtinguiſh the words, that were directed to him.

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As to the Gentiles, nothing can be imagined more unpromiſing than the miſſion of the apoſtles to them. The pride of the Jews, and the contempt with which they treated other nations, had given riſe, as was natural, to an equal degree of hatred and contempt on their ſide; ſo that nothing coming from a *Jew*, was at all likely to be favourably attended to by them. The heathens in general, and the Greeks and Romans in particular, were moſt ſtrongly attached to the rites of their religions, and thought the obſervance of them neceſſary to the proſperity of their ſeveral ſtates. The graveſt magiſtrates dreaded the diſcontinuance of them, and the profligate and licentious among the heathens, gave a looſe, as I have ſhewn, under the ſanction of religion, to their favourite vicious propenſities, in the greateſt latitude. The learned and philoſophical among the heathens, looked with the greateſt contempt on the plainneſs and want of eloquence, in the apoſtles, and other preachers of chriſtianity. In this ſtate of things, then, was it to be

expected that the heathen world in general, would be at all credulous, with respect to miracles wrought by such men. On the contrary, the preachers of christianity, had nothing to expect but the extreme of incredulity. In fact, great numbers could not be brought to give the least attention to any thing that was reported concerning them, or to look into any of their books. Dr. Lardner observes, that it is pretty evident that even Pliny, who gave the emperor Trajan an account of his proceedings against the Christians, and his examination of them, when they were brought before his tribunal, (and he was a man of letters) had not read any of the books of the New Testament, or any other writings of Christians, which were unquestionably extant. If, therefore, the new religion did make its way, it must have been against every possible disadvantage, and history shews that this was the case.

5. In order to secure credit to accounts of miracles, there must be both *opportunity*, and *motive*, for examining into the truth of

of the facts. Now, the miracles being numerous, a circumſtance on which I have already enlarged, gives opportunity for examination; ſo alſo does that of their continuance ſome ſpace of time, and this was the caſe with reſpect to many, I may ſay almoſt all the miracles, which have been already mentioned, particularly the ſeveral plagues of Egypt, none of which were momentary appearances, but all were of ſome days continuance. Such, alſo, was the paſſage through the red ſea, and the river Jordan, one of which took up a whole night, and the other a whole day. The ſame was the caſe with reſpect to the delivery of the ten commandments from mount Sinai, but more eſpecially the miracle of the manna, and the pillar of cloud and fire, which connued forty years.

The cures performed by Jeſus, though inſtantaneous, produced laſting effects, eſpecially his raiſing of the dead, as of Lazarus, which, as we read, excited much curioſity to ſee him afterwards. Our Saviour's own appearance after his reſurrection, was not like

like that of an apparition in the night, but always in the day time, and frequently repeated. His firſt appearance was when his diſciples had no expectation of any ſuch thing, ſo that they could not have been deceived by their imaginations, and afterwards by particular appointment, ſo that they had time to recollect themſelves, and to procure any kind of ſatisfaction that they wanted; and this continued the ſpace of forty days before his aſcenſion, which appears to have been leiſurely, ſo that they who were preſent ſtood gazing ſome time, while they ſaw him go above the clouds. He did not leave them in a private manner, and go they knew not whither.

But the beſt opportunity for examining the truth of any facts, is when ſome perſons aſſert, and others deny them, and when they are at the ſame time much intereſted in the event of the inquiry, as by having what is moſt dear to them depending upon it. And this was remarkably the caſe with reſpect to the reſurrection of Jeſus. With reſpect to his miracles, and

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alſo thoſe of the apoſtles, there does not appear to have been any diſpute about them, by thoſe who were then in the country. They only aſcribed them to a falſe cauſe. But Jeſus not appearing to all perſons after his reſurrection, and eſpecially not to his enemies, but only to his friends, though in numbers abundantly ſufficient for the purpoſe, his enemies denied *that* fact.

The fact, however, was of ſo very important a nature, that we cannot doubt but that it muſt have been thoroughly inveſtigated, much more ſo than any other fact in all hiſtory, becauſe infinitely more depended upon it, than upon any other fact whatever. For in a very ſhort time ſuch was the rage of the rulers of the Jews againſt the riſing ſect, that not only were the peace, and the property, but the lives of the Chriſtians at ſtake, and theſe they would not give up for an idle tale. At the ſame time their perſecutors, who were the men in power, ſtimulated by hatred and oppoſition, would leave nothing untried to refute the ſtory. This ſtate of things began immediately after

after the reſurrection of Jeſus, and continued about three hundred years, during all which time the Chriſtians, though expoſed to grevious perſecution, kept increaſing in number, till at the time that Conſtantine was advanced to the empire, it was not only ſafe, but advantageous to him to declare himſelf a Chriſtian. We may therefore be ſatisfied, that the great fact of the reſurrection of Jeſus, on which the truth of chriſtianity more particularly depends, underwent a more thorough inveſtigation than any other fact in hiſtory.

This rigorous ſcrutiny began while the event was recent, and when there was, accordingly, the beſt opportunity of examining into its truth or falſehood. Paul, who ſays that Jeſus at one time appeared to more than five hundred perſons, ſays that the greater part of them were then living, and of courſe liable to be interrogated on the ſubject. Now, had Jeſus appeared as publicly after his crucifixion as he did before, and of courſe the whole Jewiſh nation had become Chriſtians, we

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ſhould now have been without this moſt ſatisfactory argument for the truth of the fact.

It would, in this caſe, have been ſaid, that the Jews, always a credulous nation, (though this has appeared to have been the reverſe of the truth) had for ſome reaſon or other, which it is now impoſſible to aſcertain, changed their religion, or rather made ſome addition to what they profeſſed before, and that as no perſon objected to it at the time, there is no evidence now before us that the facts, or reaſons, on which it was founded, were properly ſcrutinized; and that it is impoſſible to do it at this diſtance. And thus chriſtianity might have ſpread no farther than Judaiſm.

6. To enſure the credibility of miracles, it muſt appear that the accounts of of them were written while the facts were recent, ſo that an appeal might be made to living witneſſes, and this was never in antient times queſtioned with reſpect to the principal books of the Old or the New Teſtament.

Teſtament. Beſides, the internal evidence of the books aſcribed to Moſes, having been written by him, or by ſome perſon under his direction, which to every impartial reader of them, muſt appear ſtronger than the evidence of any other books having been written by any other perſons, whoſe names they bear, the fact was never doubted by the Hebrew nation, the only proper witneſſes in the caſe, from the earlieſt times to the preſent; and nothing ſtronger than this can be ſaid in favour of the authenticity of any writings whatever.

This argument is peculiarly ſtrong with reſpect to the writings of Moſes, on account of the reluctance with which thoſe writings, and the whole hiſtory of that nation, ſhows, that they received his inſtructions. If thoſe of the Iſraelites who were addicted to the religious rites of the neighbouring nations, and who were frequently the majority of the people, could have ſhewn that the books aſcribed to Moſes, were not written by him, or

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by his authority, would they not have done it, and thereby have had the beſt reaſon for continuing in the religion they preferred? And what motive could any man have to forge books which would be ſure to give the greateſt offence, and could not fail to be rejected with contempt and indignation?

The account of the death of Moſes in the laſt chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, could not have been written by himſelf. But what was more natural, than for ſome perſon of eminence, acquainted with the fact, perhaps Joſhua, or the high prieſt at the time, adding this account to the writings of Moſes, and its being afterwards annexed to them. Alſo, notes by way of explanation of certain paſſages, were, no doubt, firſt inſerted in the margin, as has been the caſe with many antient books, and afterwards added by tranſcribers, in the text. But ſuch circumſtances as theſe are never thought to affect the genuineneſs of any antient writings. Judicious criticiſm eaſily diſtinguiſhes the caſual additions, from the original text.

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The internal evidence of the authenticity of the writings of Moſes is peculiarly ſtrong. No other than a perſon actually preſent at the tranſactions could have related them in the manner in which we find his narratives written, with ſo many particulars of perſons, times, and places, and with ſo natural an account of the impreſſion that was made on the minds of men by the events that he relates*.

* That additions may be made to books, and even ſuch as the writers diſapprove of, we have a remarkable inſtance of in the firſt part of Mr. *Paine's Age of Reaſon*. In the ſecond part juſt publiſhed in this city, he ſays, p. 84. "The former part of the *Age of Reaſon* has not been publiſhed two "years, and there is already an expreſſion in it that is not mine. "The expreſſion is, *The book of Luke was carried by a majority of "one vote only*. It may be true, but it is not I that have ſaid "it. Some perſon, who might know of that circumſtance, "has added it in a note at the bottom of the page of ſome of "the editions, printed either in England or in America, and "the printers, after that have erected it into the body of the "work, and made me the author of it. If this has happened within ſuch a ſhort ſpace of time, notwithſtanding the "aid of printing, which prevents the alteration of copies "individually, what may not have happened in a much "greater length of time, where there was no printing." He adds, "and when any man who would write, could make "a written copy, and call it an original by Matthew, Mark, "Luke, or John." But though this might eaſily happen with reſpect to ſlight circumſtances, according with the reſt of a book

It ſhould alſo be conſidered, that books were not forged till men were practiſed in the art of writing, and many books had been written, ſo that conſiderable advances had been made in the art of compoſition and of criticiſm. We may therefore conclude with certainty, that the books aſcribed to Moſes, which are unqueſtionably of as great antiquity as any in the world, except perhaps the book of Job, and a very few others mentioned by Moſes, are no forgeries. Otherwiſe, the art of forging hiſtorical writings, the moſt difficult of all others, was brought to the greateſt perfection all at once, a ſuppoſition that cannot be admitted. Indeed, there does not appear to have been the

a book, well known to exiſt, the fabrication of *whole books*, which were not known to exiſt at all, and impoſing them on the world, when the belief of their contents drew after it the ſacrifice of every thing dear to a man in life, and often of life itſelf, was not ſo eaſy.

The inſertion Mr. Paine complains of, being a recent thing, and all the editions of his book not very numerous, may be traced to its author, and it behoves him, or his friends, to do it; but this cannot be done with reſpect to books written two or three thouſand years ago.

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leaſt ſuſpicion of the forgery of any books till after the time in which all thoſe of the Old Teſtament are well known to have been extant. There cannot, therefore, be any reaſonable doubt but that the books aſcribed not only to Moſes, but thoſe to the prophets Iſaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, are genuine, except ſo far as they may have ſuffered by tranſcribers.

The objection of Porphyry to the book of Daniel, that it was written after the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (for which it does not appear that he had any other evidence than the exact fulfilment of ſome part of his prophecies in the events) is certainly not to be regarded. It can derive no more weight from the time in which he wrote, than if it had been firſt advanced at this day, becauſe it is only an argument from what appears on the face of the book itſelf, which is before us, as it was before him. And at that time the evidence of the whole Jewiſh nation, which had always recieved that book, and in fact that of the Samaritans too, who,

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as far as appears, never objected to it, was againſt him.

In is moreover ſelf evident, and indeed never was denied, that the books of the Old Teſtament were written by different perſons, and at different times. That any number of them ſhould have been written by the ſame perſon, or a combination of perſons, and impoſed upon a whole nation as written in former times, and by different perſons in thoſe times (eſpecially conſidering the many ungrateful truths contained in theſe books) is an hypotheſis which no perſon will ſay is even poſſible. Conſequently, the references to particular books from others, may ſafely be admitted as an evidence of their genuineneſs, which is the principal argument for the age, and the genuineneſs, of all other antient writings. Now it appears from the books of Kings and Chronicles, that Iſaiah lived in the time of Hezekiah, and from the ſame that Jeremiah lived at the time of the ſiege of Jeruſalem by Nebuchadnezzar, which is abundantly evident from his own writ-

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ings. The narrative part of the book of Jeremiah is remarkably circumſtantial, ſo as to render its internal evidence unqueſtionable. I do not even think it poſſible for any perſon of the leaſt degree of judgment in theſe matters, to entertain a ſuſpicion of its being a forgery of a later time. Jeremiah is alſo mentioned in the book of Daniel. Such too is the internal evidence for the genuineneſs of the book of Ezekiel who makes mention of Daniel, of that of Daniel too, and of all the other prophetical books, in which there is any mention of or alluſion to hiſtorical facts.

A circumſtance which adds to the authenticity of the writings of Moſes, is, that the ſolemn cuſtoms and religious rites of the Jews, ſuch as their public feſtivals, and eſpecially the obſervance of the paſſover, were coeval with them, ſo that they, as it were, vouch for each other. The paſſover was a ſolemn cuſtom, expreſsly inſtituted, in commemoration of the deliverance of the Iſraelites from their bondage in Egypt, and began to be obſerved at

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the very time; ſo that accompanied as it is with the written account of it, it is the moſt authentic of all records. No other event in hiſtory, is ſo fully authenticated as this, except that of the death of Chriſt, by a ſimilar rite, viz. that of the Lord's Supper.

The early exiſtence of the ſect of the Samaritans affords a proof that the books of Moſes have not undergone any material alteration from before the time of the Babyloniſh captivity. If Ezra, who collected the books after that event, had made any material alteration in them, the Samaritans, who were then extremely hoſtile to him, and to all who reſided and worſhipped at Jeruſalem, would, no doubt, have expoſed it. But in our Saviour's time, they had the ſame reſpect for the books of Moſes, that the Jews themſelves ever had; and this they have at this very day. It is probable too, that they had the ſame reſpect for the writings of the prophets, though they did not make uſe of them in their religious worſhip, and therefore had

no copies of them; for they appear (John iv. 25.) to have expected a Meſſiah, of whom there is no account, but in the writings of the prophets.

There is ſimilar evidence, internal and external, that the principal books of the New Teſtament, by which I mean the hiſtorical ones, and alſo that the epiſtles of Paul, were written while the events were recent, and that they were received as ſuch, by thoſe who were moſt intereſted in their contents. This was never queſtioned by any unbeliever, within ſeveral hundred years of the time of their publication. It was admitted by Celſus, and the emperor Julian, both of whom wrote againſt chriſtianity, and did not even queſtion the truth of the greater part of the miracles recorded in them. And yet Mr. Paine, ignorant of this, aſſerts in the ſecond part of his *Age of Reaſon*, p. 83. that 'there is not the leaſt ſhadow 'of evidence, who the perſons were that 'wrote the books aſcribed to Matthew, 'Mark, Luke or John, that none of the 'books of the New Teſtament, were written

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'ten by the men called apoſtles, and that 'there was no ſuch book as the *New* '*Teſtament*, till more than three hundred 'years after the time that Chriſt is ſaid to 'have lived,' that is about the time of Conſtantine. On this ſuppoſition how ſtupendous a miracle, muſt have been the overthrow of heatheniſm, and the general reception of Chriſtianity, in the Roman empire at that period. This would have been far more extraordinary, than all the miracles recorded in the ſcriptures. But to this obvious conſequence of his hypotheſis, Mr. Paine had certainly given no attention. In the ſame manner, he alone, of all unbelievers, ſays that none of the books of the Old Teſtament, were written before the Babyloniſh captivity. He might with as much plauſibility, ſay that the whole Bible was a publication of the laſt century.

Facts ſo intereſting to thouſands, recorded in this manner, in books univerſally received as genuine, by thoſe who muſt have known whether they were ſo or not, have the teſtimony not of the writers only,

but of the age in which they were publiſhed. In reality, the authenticity of the facts recorded in the New Teſtament, does not at all depend on the authenticity of the books; for chriſtianity exiſted, and had made a conſiderable ſpread, long before any of the books were written. The books were not the *cauſe*, but the *effect*, of the belief of it. The authors of theſe books were not writers by profeſſion, but only wrote when neceſſity, in a manner, called for them, that is, when thoſe who were beſt acquainted with the facts, were about to quit the ſtage, and other perſons ſolicited their teſtimony to them; and this was not till about thirty years after the death of Chriſt, when there were Chriſtians in all parts of the Roman empire. The epiſtles of Paul were written before that time; and in them we find alluſions to the ſtate of things, at the time of his writing, and their exact correſpondence to the hiſtory, would be a ſtrong confirmation of it, if ſuch confirmation were wanting.

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7. In the laſt place, the miracles recorded in the ſcriptures, produced a great and permanent effect, correſponding to their extraordinary nature; which abundantly proves that they were believed by thoſe before whom they were exhibited, or who had an opportunity of informing themſelves concerning them. Thoſe which were wrought in Egypt, effected the deliverance of the Iſraelites, from their ſtate of ſervitude in that country, though they were then the moſt unwarlike, and their maſters perhaps the moſt warlike people in the world, and exceedingly deſirous to detain them.

But what was much more than this, addicted as the Iſraelites were to the religious rites of the Egyptians, and fond of ſimilar rites, in the religions of all the neighbouring nations, ſuch an impreſſion was made upon them by the miracles wrought in their favour, and eſpecially the delivery of the law from mount Sinai, that they actually adopted a very complex ſyſtem of religion, the reverſe of any thing of the

the kind, to which they had been accuſtomed, and which they were far from being prediſpoſed to like, or to receive; and in all their apoſtacies afterwards, it does not appear that they ever diſbelieved the facts. They only thought they might join the worſhip of other gods with that of their own, at leaſt with the acknowledgment of the truth of their own, which was then the prevailing ſentiment of all nations, who ſcrupled not to admit the pretenſions of other gods along with their own, and to join in their worſhip, eſpecially in the countries ſuppoſed to be under their immediate protection, which was the caſe with reſpect to the modes of worſhip, to which the Iſraelites ſo often revolted. On the other hand, it appears, that the neighbouring nations entertained the greateſt reſpect for the God, and the religion, of the Iſraelites, though they did not conform to it. This was the caſe with the Philiſtines, the Syrians, the Babylonians, and the Perſians; as it would be eaſy to ſhew by facts in their hiſtory.

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The effect produced by the miracles recorded in the New Teſtament was ſtill more evident, becauſe more extenſive. Many thouſands of the Jews became converts to chriſtianity on its firſt promulgation, notwithſtanding their extreme averſion to receive any ſcheme of the kind, from their attachment to their antient religion, which they thought to be incompatible with the new, eſpecially after the admiſſion of the Gentiles into the chriſtian church. From this time, indeed, Jewiſh converts were much leſs numerous than before, this circumſtance ſhocking their prejudices in a peculiar manner. Many of thoſe who were already chriſtians were exceedingly offended at it.

But the moſt extenſive effect of the miracles wrought by Chriſt and the apoſtles was the reception of chriſtianity by the Gentiles, attached as they were to the rites of their antient religions, which were enforced by the laws, and recommended by all the learning and philoſophy of the age, and notwithſtanding the

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preachers of the goſpel laboured under the greateſt diſadvantages, being Jews, generally illiterate, and deſtitute of any talent of public ſpeaking or writing, and having nothing to promiſe their converts but happineſs in another world, with perſecution in this. Yet with all theſe diſadvantages, in a reaſonable ſpace of time, and exceedingly ſhort, conſidering the magnitude of the event, a complete revolution was effected in all the Roman empire, which at that time comprehended almoſt all the civilized part of the world; the heathen religion which had prevailed from time immemorial, being every where diſcredited, and new rites and cuſtoms the reverſe of them, adopted.

No revolution produced by force of arms can be compared to this, which was effected without arms, by the mere force of truth, the evidence of which muſt have been invincibly ſtrong to have prevailed as it did. Incredulous as unbelievers now are, thouſands, as incredulous as they, and more intereſted than they can be,

be, to diſcredit chriſtianity, became converts to it; and therefore, though they now give little attention to the evidence, which does not force itſelf upon them, as it did upon thoſe who lived nearer to the time of the tranſactions, had they lived in thoſe times, they might, with the ſame indiſpoſition to this religion, have been unable to reſiſt the evidence with which the publication of it was accompanied. To do themſelves and the queſtion juſtice, they ſhould put themſelves in the place of their predeceſſors, conſider how the evidence ſtood in their time, what was then objected to chriſtianity by men as quickſighted and as prejudiced as themſelves, and ſay whether they would abide by their objections. They certainly would not, becauſe they go upon quite different principles, and ſuch as all modern unbelievers would reject, and even with more contempt, than they reject chriſtianity. Will they now aſcribe the miracles of Chriſt and his apoſtles to the power of magic?

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The ſtate of the argument very near to the promulgation of chriſtianity is eaſily aſcertained, and certainly ought to be particularly attended to. All that the antient unbelievers objected to chriſtianity, has been carefully collected by Dr. Lardner, in his excellent work on *Jewiſh and Heathen Teſtimonies*, and a ſummary view of the whole may be ſeen in the ſecond part of my *Letters to a Philoſophical Unbeliever*. But *inattention*, joined to *averſion*, to any ſubject will account for any degree of incredulity with reſpect to it. Several among the moſt conſiderable unbelievers in France will not admit that there ever was any ſuch perſon as Jeſus Chriſt; when with more reaſon they might ſay there were never ſuch perſons as Alexander the Great, or Julius Cæſar.

But the greateſt effect produced by the miracles recorded in the New Teſtament, an effect far more difficult to be accompliſhed than any change of *opinion*, or ſpeculative principles, is from vice to virtue, which, however, was produced in thouſands.

thouſands. For this we have the teſtimony of all hiſtory. *Be not deceived*, ſays the apoſtle Paul, 1 Corin. vi. 9, *neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abuſers of themſelves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, ſhall inherit the kingdom of God. And ſuch were ſome of you. But ye are waſhed, but ye are ſanctified, but ye are juſtified in the name of the Lord Jeſus, and by the ſpirit of our God*, that is by the power of chriſtianity and its evidences, commonly called the gift of the ſpirit.

If we compare the evidence of the miracles recorded in the ſcriptures with that of any that are mentioned by heathen writers, we ſhall ſoon be convinced of the ſuperiority of that of the former. Mr. Hume ſays, that the cure of the blind and the lame man, ſaid by Tacitus and Suetonius to have been performed by the emperor Veſpaſian, at Alexandria, is 'one of 'the beſt atteſted of any in profane hiſtory,' and he meant, I doubt not, in any hiſtory.

But

But this boaſted miracle is not related by any perſon who was preſent. The oldeſt account we have of it being written about thirty years after the event. It was not exhibited before enemies. Such cures as theſe might eaſily have been pretended by perſons prepared beforehand. The heathens were very credulous with reſpect to things of this kind, and the report of theſe might be very uſeful to procure credit to the new emperor. There was no ſcrutiny into the truth of the fact at the time. Indeed ſuch ſcrutiny would have been diſcountenanced, and not have been very ſafe. And laſtly, the pretended miracles do not appear to have produced any effect. It is even almoſt certain, that the hiſtorians themſelves did not believe them. What then muſt have been the force of prejudice in a man who could think that theſe miracles were better atteſted than thoſe of the ſcriptures?

Such, my brethren, is the outline, for it is nothing more, of the evidence of the credibility of the miracles recorded in the

Old

Old and New Teſtament. It is readily acknowledged, that the great truths to be proved by them, have nothing in them incredible, but on the contrary, are of ſuch a nature as to be both deſirable in themſelves, and probable, *a priori* (conſidering the ſtate of vice and igorance in which the world was involved, when deſtitute of that light, and conſidering the benevolence of our common parent, who indeed permits all evils, but only for a time, and makes them ſubſervient to good) they yet require much ſtronger evidence than ordinary facts, in proportion to their want of analogy to ſuch events as fall under our daily obſervation. But notwithſtanding this, the evidence for them is abundantly ſufficient for the purpoſe. The miracles, as I have ſhewn, were ſufficiently numerous, they were performed on the largeſt ſcale, they were, from their nature, free from any ſuſpicion of trick and impoſition, they were exhibited in the preſence of perſons the leaſt prediſpoſed to believe them, or to be influenced by them; they

were

were ſubjected to the moſt rigorous examination at the time, and while they were recent, the written accounts of them were of the ſame age with the events themſelves, and they actually produced the moſt extraordinary effects; which proves that they were fully aſſented to at the time, by thoſe who had the beſt opportunity of inquiring into the truth, and the ſtrongeſt motives for doing ſo.

More than this it is not in the power of any perſon to require, and therefore it is all that is neceſſary to the moſt complete ſatisfaction. I mean of the candid and attentive.

For there is a ſtate of mind in which no evidence can have any effect, as we ſee every day, and we muſt not expect that miracles will now be wrought for the conviction of any perſons, and leaſt of all miraculous changes in the diſpoſitions of men's minds. Indeed, ſuch miracles as thoſe do not appear ever to have been wrought. All miracles were external, and the reflection on them produced its natural

effect,

effect, on the minds of thoſe who gave due attention to them; and who were ſuitably impreſſed with them.

As to the proper time for working miracles, and making this or that age the witneſſes of them, and of courſe the vouchers of their reality to others, it is a queſtion which we muſt acknowledge we are not able to anſwer. But neither does it concern us to anſwer it, any more than to aſſign a reaſon why it pleaſed the Divine Being to create the world, or men and other animals, at one time rather than another, or why he did not make more or fewer planets to attend the ſun, &c. &c. Of every thing of this nature, he alone is the proper judge. It is enough for us if we be ſatisfied, on ſufficient evidence, that miracles have been wrought at any time, and if we have been informed of the purpoſe for which they were wrought. If they were actually ſeen by others, though at ever ſo great a diſtance of time, they ought, in reaſon, to have the ſame effect as if ſeen by ourſelves, and we are as inexcuſable

excuſable, if we be not as much influenced by them. And if God has ſpoken, it cannot be a matter of indifference, whether we will attend to his voice or not. In this caſe I may ſay, after our Saviour, *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

DISCOURSE XI.

The proof of Revealed Religion from Prophecy.

I have even from the beginning declared it unto thee. Before it came to paſs I ſhewed it thee, leſt thou ſhouldeſt ſay mine idol has done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, have commanded them.

ISAIAH. xlviii. 5.

THERE is not, perhaps, any thing more excluſively within the province of the Supreme Being than the foreknowledge of future events, depending on the volitions of men. For though all things future may be ſaid to exiſt in their cauſes, which are preſent, thoſe cauſes are not apparent, and their operations and combinations, are ſuch as no human intellect can trace; ſo that to us they are as contingent, and uncertain, as if the cauſes did not exiſt. They who know mankind

in general, and even particular perſons, the beſt, can only *conjecture* how they will act in given circumſtances, and are often miſtaken; but how they will act in *future time*, when it cannot be known in what circumſtances they will then be, is what no man will pretend to, and this ſtill leſs with reſpect to perſons then unborn. A prediction of a future and diſtant event, depending on the voluntary actions of men, has therefore the effect of a miracle of the moſt indiſputable kind. Now many ſuch are recorded in the ſcriptures, and conſequently ought to be enumerated among the cleareſt proofs of their divine authority, and of the truth of the religion they contain. For this reaſon I ſhall make them the ſubject of this diſcourſe, ſhewing, from the circumſtances of the predictions, that they are not liable to any juſt ſuſpicion of impoſture, that in this reſpect they were the reverſe of the oracles of the heathens, and that they have been clearly verified by the events.

There

There were two ways in which the knowledge of future events was communicated to the Hebrews. One was by conſulting the *oracle*, as it may be called, when anſwers to particular queſtions were given to the high-prieſt; and the other by prophets, who were raiſed up from time to time to ſpeak to the people in the name of God. I ſhall conſider the circumſtances of both.

1. The regular method of conſulting the divine oracle, called *inquiring of the Lord*, was by the chief magiſtrate attending in the ſanctuary along with the high-prieſt in his proper veſtments, directing him what queſtions to put; when the anſwers were equally heard by them both. Thus when Joſhua was appointed to ſucceed Moſes, it is ſaid, Num. xxvii. 26. *And he ſhall ſtand by Eleazar the prieſt, who ſhall aſk council for him, after the judgment of Urim, before the Lord.* From this it is obvious, that it was not in the power of the high-prieſt to impoſe upon the country what he thought proper, as a divine ora-

cle. It does not even appear that he ever went of his own accord to conſult the oracle, but only when required to do ſo by the civil magiſtrate, who attended along with him, and heard the anſwer as well as himſelf. Of this we have ſeveral examples in the courſe of the ſcripture hiſtory. Indeed, it is evident from the whole hiſtory of the Hebrews, that neither by this, nor by any other means, was it in the power of the prieſts to acquire any more authority than was given them in the original conſtitution.

If this had been the caſe, they would always have preſerved their ſuperiority over any occaſional prophet, whoſe claim to reſpect interfered with theirs. How, for example, could it be ſuppoſed that the old high-prieſt Eli would eaſily have acquieſced in the divine communications made to the child Samuel, which contained the heavieſt denunciations againſt himſelf and his family? But inſtead of contradicting them, though delivered by a mere child, he, with the greateſt reſignation,

replied,

replied, *It is the Lord, let him do what ſeemeth him good.* Surely here was no prieſtcraft. Neither under the judges, nor under the kings, did any high-prieſt acquire the ſmalleſt addition to his civil power, or to his emolument.

2. The Hebrew oracle appears to have been acceſſible at all times alike; which was not the caſe with the oracles of Greece. That at Delphi could only be conſulted during one particular month in the year, which was in the ſpring; and, as it ſhould ſeem, only on a few ſtated days in that month. At other times, as we are informed, the greateſt princes could not by any means obtain an anſwer. This certainly gave the heathen prieſts a better opportunity of knowing what queſtions were likely to be propoſed, and of being prepared with the anſwers.

3. No expence attended the conſultation of the Hebrew oracle, ſo that the prieſts could not derive any emolument from it; whereas the conſulting of the Grecian oracles was ſo very expenſive, on account of

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the ſacrifices that were to be offered, and the preſents that were expected on the occaſion, that only the great and the wealthy could have acceſs to them. The riches of which the temple of Delphi was poſſeſſed, from the donations of opulent princes, ſuch as Cræſus king of Lydia, were immenſe; but it does not appear that either the tabernacle, or the temple, of the Iſraelites, gained any thing by this means.

4. Nothing was done to overawe the perſons who conſulted the Hebrew oracle; or to affect their imaginations, ſo as to prepare them to receive whatever anſwers the prieſt, who directed the oracle, might ſuggeſt; which was the caſe more or leſs, with all the Grecian oracles, but eſpecially that of Trophonius. The perſon who conſulted this oracle went into a cavern, and and not immediately, on his preſenting himſelf, but after much ſolemn prepartion.*

* In this time all his food was the remains of ſacrifices, and he was not permitted to bathe. After this he was waſhed by boys of thirteen years of age, and when this was done, he drank of two waters, one of oblivion, and the other of remembrance, and before he entered the cavern he was brought to

Such were the marks of terror and melancholy with which perſons uſually came out of this cavern, that when any perſon was unuſually dejected, they ſaid he looked as if he had been conſulting the oracle of Trophonius.

5. The anſwer of the Hebrew oracle was always delivered in an articulate voice, which was not liable to miſconſtruction; whereas all the Grecian oracles, except that of Apollo, gave their anſwers in a different manner, as by dreams, the flight of

to a certain ſtatue, before which he made ſome prayers. Being then conducted to the mouth of the cavern, he deſcended by a ladder, which he brought with him for the purpoſe. At the bottom of this deſcent he came to a narrow paſſage, through which he was required to thruſt himſelf with his feet foremoſt; but during this he was forcibly dragged along till he came to the place where he was to wait for his anſwer, which was ſometimes given in words, and ſometimes only by appearances of various kinds. After this, which ſometimes detained him more than a day, he returned through the narrow paſſage in the ſame manner as before, viz. with his feet foremoſt. The prieſts then placed him on a kind of throne, and inquired of him what he had heard or ſeen, and they made the report to others, who then carried him, commonly in a ſtate of ſtupefaction, with terror and aſtoniſhment, to the chapel of good genius, and of good

of birds, or the entrails of beaſts, &c. &c. At Pheræ, a city of Achaia, there was an oracle of Mercury, where the perſon who conſulted it, after making the proper ſacrifices and offerings, propoſed his queſtion; and in order to get an anſwer to it, walked with his ears ſtopped by his hands, through the market-place, and then removing them, took the firſt words that he happened to hear for the anſwer of the oracle. At another oracle in Achaia, the anſwer was given by throwing dice, inſcribed with particular characters, which the prieſts interpreted. At another place in

good fortune, where after ſome time he recovered his ſenſes and cheerfulneſs. This account is given by Pauſanias, an eminent Greek writer, who ſays that he had himſelf conſulted this oracle.

Another perſon, of whom Plutarch gives an account, was detained two days and nights in this cavern, and when he came out he gave an account of many ſtrange ſights that he had ſeen, and frightful ſounds that he had heard, reſembling the yellings and howlings of wild beaſts, as well as a diſcourſe that was delivered to him. Who does not ſee that it was in the power of the prieſts to conduct all this machinery juſt as they pleaſed, taking advantage of the terror which was unavoidable in theſe circumſtances?

in the ſame country, the anſwer of the oracle, which was only given to queſtions relating to ſickneſs, was given by letting down a mirror into a fountain, and obſerving the figures and images on its ſurface.

6. There was no ambiguity in the anſwer given by the Hebrew oracle. It was always plain and direct, not capable of two conſtructions, of which the prieſts might avail themſelves on comparing it with the event, as was remarkably the caſe with reſpect to many of the anſwers returned by the Grecian oracles, even that of Apollo at Delphi, which, however, was celebrated for the comparative perſpicuity of its anſwers. Two of theſe anſwers are particularly mentioned by Herodotus.

When the Lacedemonians inquired of the oracle whether they ſhould ſucceed in their attempt to conquer all Arcadia, they received for anſwer, they ſhould not, but that he would give them *Tegea*, which

was

was very fruitful, and which they ſhould meaſure with a line. On this they had no doubt but that they ſhould gain the poſſeſſion of it; but being defeated in battle, many of the Lacedemonians were made priſoners, and compelled to cultivate the ground for their conquerors; and in doing this, they made uſe of a line to meaſure it, which was deemed to be a fulfilment of the oracle. Again, when Cræſus conſulted the ſame oracle, on his engaging in a war with Cyrus, he received for anſwer, that if he did, he ſhould overturn a great empire, and that the Perſians would not conquer him until they had a mule for their prince. Being conquered, and loſing his empire, he ſent to upbraid the oracle for deceiving him, but he was anſwered, that the empire that was to be overturned was his own, and that Cyrus being deſcended from a Perſian father, and a Median mother, was the mule intended by the oracle.

The Hebrew oracle never returned ſuch anſwers as theſe, but always ſuch as

were

were direct, and perfectly intelligible. The divine oracle ſubſiſted, though in ſome different manner, before the time of Moſes. For we read that Rebecca, when ſhe found herſelf with child, and felt a violent motion in her womb, inquired of the Lord, and received the following anſwer, Gen. xxv. 23, *Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people ſhall be ſeparated from thy bowels. The one ſhall be ſtronger than the other, and the elder ſhall ſerve the younger.*

When the oracle was conſulted after the death of Joſhua, we read, Jud. i. 1. *Then Iſrael aſked the Lord, ſaying, Who ſhall go up, for us againſt the Canaanites firſt, to fight againſt them, Jehovah ſaid Judah ſhall go up, behold I have delivered the land into his hand.* David, in the courſe of his life, received ſeveral anſwers from the oracle, one of which was very particular. The Philiſtines ſpreading themſelves, as we read, 2 Sam. v. 23. in the valley of Rephaim, when David inquired of the Lord,

Lord, he ſaid, *Thou ſhalt not go up, but fetch a compaſs behind them, and come upon them over againſt the mulberry trees; and let it be when thou heareſt the ſound of a marching in the top of the mulberry trees, that then thou ſhalt beſtir thyſelf, for then ſhall the Lord go out before thee to ſmite the hoſt of the Philiſtines.* We have no account of any other anſwer from this oracle, that was not equally plain, and free from ambiguity.

All the directions and predictions that were occaſionally delivered by the God of Iſrael, or by angels commiſſioned by him, were equally clear and intelligible. Such was the original command given to Abraham, Gen. xii. 1. 'Get thee out of thy 'country, and from thy kindred, and from 'thy father's houſe, unto a land that I will 'ſhew thee, and I will make of thee a 'great nation, and thou ſhalt be a bleſſing.' ſuch was the meſſage to Hagar when ſhe fled from her miſtreſs, Geneſis. xvi. 11. 'And the angel of the Lord ſaid unto her, 'Behold thou art with child, and ſhalt bear

'bear a ſon, and call his name Iſhmael, 'and he will be a wild man; his hand will 'be againſt every man, and every man's 'hand againſt him, and he ſhall dwell in 'the preſence of all his brethren.' A prediction which has been exactly verified in the general character, and hiſtory, of the Arabs, who are deſcended from Iſhmael, to this very day. All the commands of God to Moſes were perſpicuous, and free from ambiguity; and ſo were all the divine communications without any exception.

Sometimes communications were made in dreams, and by means of emblems; but the interpretations were given in the moſt intelligible language. Thus Joſeph in the interpretation of their reſpective dreams, told Pharoah's baker, that after three days he would be hanged, and that the butler would at the ſame time be reſtored to his office; and he told Pharoah that the next ſeven years would be years of unuſual plenty, but would be followed by ſeven years of famine. The prophetic dreams of Nebuchadnezzar were interpreted

preted with the ſame diſtinctneſs by Daniel, and Daniel's own dreams by an angel.

Beſides the regular *oracle*, to which the Iſraelites had acceſs on particular emergencies, God was pleaſed to ſend to that nation a ſucceſſion of *prophets*, and they all delivered their meſſages in the plaineſt language, as became the meſſengers of God. The greateſt, and ſtrictly ſpeaking, the firſt, of theſe prophets, was Moſes; and nothing could be more diſtinct and intelligible than the manner in which he always ſpake in the name of God, on a great variety of occaſions; and he was informed that there would be a ſucceſſion of prophets, like himſelf, Deut. xviii. 18. 'I will raiſe them up a prophet 'among their brethren, like unto thee, 'and will put my words in his mouth, 'and he ſhall ſpeak unto them all that I 'command him.'

An example of this we have in the meſſage which the prophet Ahijah was directed to deliver to Jeruſalem, of which

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we have an account 1 Kings, xi. 29. 'And 'it came to paſs at that time, when Je- 'roboam went out of Jeruſalem,' (which was in the reign of Solomon,) 'that the 'prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him 'in the way, and he clad himſelf in a new 'garment, and they two were alone in 'the field. And Ahijah caught the new 'garment that was on him, and rent it in 'twelve pieces. And he ſaid to Jerobo- 'am, Take thee ten pieces. For thus 'ſaith the Lord, the God of Iſrael. Be- 'hold I will rend the kingdom out of the 'hand of Solomon, and will give ten 'tribes to thee, becauſe they have for- 'ſaken me, and have worſhipped Aſhta- 'roth, the goddeſs of the Sidonians, Che- 'moſh the god of the Moabites, and Mil- 'com the god of the children of Ammon, 'and have not walked in my way, to do 'that which is right in mine eyes, to keep 'my ſtatutes and my judgments, as did 'David his father. Howbeit, I will not 'take the whole kingdom out of his hand, 'but I will make him a prince all the 'days

'days of his life, for my ſervant David's 'ſake, whom I choſe, becauſe he kept 'my commandments and my ſtatutes: 'but I will take the kingdom out of his 'ſon's hand, and will give it unto thee, 'even ten tribes, &c.' In the ſame plain and direct manner, did all the prophets deliver themſelves; as Elijah to Ahab, Iſaiah to Ahaz,* and Hezekiah, and Jeremiah to Zedekiah. With the ſame diſtinctneſs did our Saviour deliver his prophecy concerning the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, the demolition of the temple, and the deſolation of Judea.

Let this be compared with the manner in which the pretended prophets among the

* Mr. Paine charges Iſaiah with being a falſe prophet in what he announced to Ahaz, concerning the invaſion of his kingdom by Rezin king of Syria, and Pekah king of Iſrael, which was as follows. Iſaih vii. 1, 'And it came 'to paſs in the days of Ahaz, the ſon of Jotham king of 'Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the ſon of 'Remaliah, king of Iſrael, went up towards Jeruſalem to war 'againſt it, but could not prevail againſt it. And it was told 'the houſe of David, ſaying, Syria is confederate with Eph-'raim; and his heart was moved as the trees of the wood 'are moved with the wind. Then ſaid the Lord unto Iſaiah, 'Go

the heathens delivered themſelves. It was always in a kind of madneſs, or ecſtaſy, to give the appearance of ſome other being than themſelves ſpeaking from within them, or making uſe of their organs. When the pythoneſs at Delphi delivered the oracle, with which ſhe was ſuppoſed to be inſpired, ſhe began to ſwell and foam at the mouth, tearing her hair, cutting her fleſh, and

'Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou and Shear-Jaſhub thy 'ſon, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, in the 'high way of the Fullers field, and ſay unto him, Take heed 'and be quiet, fear not, neither be faint-hearted, for the two 'tails of theſe ſmoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of 'Rezin with Syria, and of the ſon of Remaliah, becauſe 'Syria, Ephraim, and the ſon of Remaliah have taken evil 'council againſt thee, ſaying, Let us go up againſt Judah 'and vex it, and let us make a king in the midſt of it, even 'the ſon of Tabeal. Thus ſaith the Lord God, it ſhall not 'ſtand, neither ſhall it come to paſs.' He farther aſſured him that before a child that was ſoon to be born could diſtinguiſh between good and evil, the countries of his enemies would be 'forſaken of both their kings.'

On this Mr. Paine ſays, p. 47, 'To ſhew the impoſition and 'falſehood of Iſaiah, we have only to attend to the ſequel of 'this ſtory, which, though it is paſſed over in ſilence in the 'book of Iſaiah, is related in the 20th chapter of 2 Chronicles, 'and which is, that, inſtead of theſe two kings failing in 'their attempt againſt Ahaz king of Judah, as Iſaiah had 'pretended to foretel in the name of the Lord, they ſucceeded.

and in all her behaviour appearing as if diſtracted. One of them was at one time ſo enraged, that ſhe terrified not only thoſe who conſulted the oracle, but the prieſts themſelves, ſo that they ran away and left her, and ſoon after ſhe died. Others, who were ſuppoſed to pry into futurity, lay like dead men, deprived of all ſenſe and motion, and when they returned to themſelves,

'ceeded. Ahaz was defeated and deſtroyed, an hundred 'and twenty thouſand of his people were ſlaughtered, Jeru-'ſalem was plundered, and two hundred thouſand women, 'and ſons and daughters, were carried into captivity. Thus 'much for this lying prophet and impoſtor Iſaiah, and the 'book of falſehoods that bears his name.'

Such is the charge, but the defence is extremely eaſy. The calamity which Mr. Paine, with much exaggeration deſcribes, was in the beginning of the reign of Ahaz, before the prophecy was delivered. For it commenced about the death of Jotham his predeceſſor. After reciting the events of the reign of Jotham, the hiſtorian ſays, 2 Kings, xv. 37, 'In theſe days the Lord began to ſend againſt Judah, Rezin 'the king of Syria, and Pekah the ſon of Remaliah. And 'Jotham ſlept with his fathers, and Ahaz his ſon reigned 'in his ſtead.'

This calamity, great as it was, by no means extended ſo far as Mr. Paine aſſerts. For Jeruſalem was ſo far from being plundered, that it is expreſsly ſaid, 2 Kings, xvi. 5. 'That theſe two kings came up to Jeruſalem to war, and 'they beſieged Ahaz, but they could not overcome him.'

Agreeably

themſelves, they related what they had ſeen and heard. For it was their opinion that the ſoul might leave the body, wander up and down the world, viſit the regions of the dead, and even converſe with gods and heroes. Plutarch relates that while the ſoul of one Hermodorus of Clazomenæ was thus out of his body, a woman who had the cuſtody of it, delivered it to his enemies, who burned it.

Agreeably to this, Iſaiah ſays 'they went up towards Jeruſalem, to war againſt it, but could not prevail againſt it.' And ſo far were they from being able to dethrone Ahaz, and ſet up another king, the ſon of Tabeal, that Ahaz reigned ſixteen years, and in the fourth year of his reign Pekah king of Iſrael was ſlain in a conſpiracy of his own ſubject, 1. Kings, xv. 30. and about the ſame time an end was put to the kingdom of Syria by Tiglath Pileſer king of Aſſyria taking Damaſcus, whither Ahaz went to meet him.

Mr. Paine takes advantage of the figurative and no doubt hyperbolical language of the prophet Ezekiel, in his account of the deſolation of Egypt during forty years after the conqueſt of the country by Nebuchadnezzar, chap. xxix. 11. 'that no foot of man or of beaſt ſhould paſs through it.' We have no particular account of the ſtate of Egypt in this interval, but the civil war between Apries or Pharoah Hophra and Amaſis, which followed the devaſtation made by Nebuchadnezzar, muſt have made travelling particularly hazardous.

The delivery of prophecies in a frantic manner, as if the prophet was poſſeſſed by ſome demon, is ſtill practiſed in ſeveral barbarous nations, as in Tartary, and among the Indians of ſome parts of America, of which travellers give amuſing accounts. In fact, when the Grecian oracles were inſtituted, that nation had as little knowledge as the Tartars, or Indians. At this day the random ſayings of ideots, and perſons diſordered in their ſenſes, are catched up in the Eaſt, as if they came from the inſpiration of ſome ſuperior being.

But the principal queſtion before us is, not in what manner prophecies were delivered, but whether predictions ſaid to come from God, and, as ſuch, recorded in ſcripture have been verified by the events. And to this the Divine Being himſelf appeals. When the ſucceſſion of prophets mentioned above was announced to Moſes, he ſays, Deut. xviii. 21, 'If thou ſhalt 'ſay in thine heart, how ſhall we know 'the word which the Lord hath not ſpoken?

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it is anſwered, ‘ When a prophet ſpeaketh ‘ in the name of the Lord, if the thing ‘ follow not, nor come to paſs, this is ‘ the thing which the Lord hath not ‘ ſpoken, but the prophet hath ſpoken pre- ‘ ſumptuouſly. Thou ſhalt not be afraid ‘ of him.’ And on this ſubject it is that Jehovah challenges the gods of the heathens, in Iſaiah xli. 21, ‘ Produce your ‘ cauſe, ſaith the Lord, bring forth your ‘ ſtrong reaſons, ſaith the God of Jacob. ‘ Let them bring them forth, and ſhew us ‘ what ſhall happen. Let them ſhew former things what they be, that we may ‘ conſider them, and know the latter end ‘ of them, or declare us things for to ‘ come. Shew the things that are to ‘ come hereafter, that we may know that ‘ ye are gods.’ This is what no heathen oracle or prophet could do. But the ſcriptures abound with prophecies which have indiſputably been verified by the events, and in ſome caſes, at a great diſtance from the time of their delivery.

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There are few prophecies more remarkable than thoſe of Moſes, which extend even to the preſent times, and indeed far beyond them. When his nation was in a ſtate little better than that of the wild Arabs, wandering in the wilderneſs; he not only looked forward to their certainly taking poſſeſſion of the land of Canaan, then inhabited by a warlike people, who had horſes and chariots of iron, and whoſe cities are ſaid to have been fenced up to heaven, and who had many years notice of the intended attack upon them, when none of the Iſraelites had ſeen war, when they were poorly provided with weapons, and could only fight on foot, and muſt have been wholly unacquainted with the method of attacking fortified places; but he foretold their apoſtacy from their religion, their conſequent expulſion from the land of Canaan, their diſperſion into all the moſt diſtant parts of the world, their cruel ſufferings, and contemptuous treatment, in thoſe countries, of which we near three thouſand years after the prediction, are now witneſſes,

witneſſes, their ſubſiſting, notwithſtanding this, as a ſeparate people, of which alſo we are witneſſes, and likewiſe their final reſtoration, and reſettlement in their own country, when they are to be the moſt diſtinguiſhed of all nations. But I do not enlarge on this ſubject, becauſe I have done it already, in a diſcourſe which is before the public.

There is no nation bordering on the land of Canaan, whoſe future deſtiny was not foretold by ſome of the Hebrew prophets, and there is no pretence for ſaying that the predictions were written after the events. For the accompliſhment of ſeveral of them is quite recent; whereas the books have been extant between two and three thouſand years. I ſhall confine myſelf to thoſe concerning Egypt, Babylon, and Tyre, with ſome obſervations on the prophecies of Daniel.

1. The Egyptians were the firſt nation that roſe to any great degree of power, and they continued in the firſt rank of warlike people, till they were conquered by

by Nebuchadnezzar. But ſeveral years before that conqueſt, viz. in the tenth year of the captivity of Jehoiakim, three years before he undertook the ſiege of Tyre, and fourteen before his invaſion of Egypt, *the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel*, as we read, Ez. xxix. 1. &c. *ſaying, Son of man, ſet thy face againſt Pharoah king of Egypt, and prophecy againſt him, and againſt all Egypt. Speak and ſay, Thus ſaith the Lord God, Behold I am againſt thee Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midſt of his rivers, who has ſaid, My river is my own, and I have made it for myſelf*. But I will put hooks in thy jaws, and I will bring thee up out of the midſt of thy rivers. And I will leave thee thrown into the wilderneſs. I have given thee for meat to the beaſts of the field, and to the fowls of heaven, and all the inhabitants of Egypt ſhall know that I am the Lord, becauſe they have been a ſtaff of reed to the houſe of Iſrael.*

* This king of Egypt Pharaoh Hophra (called Apries by Herodotus) was remarkable for his pride and impiety. According to this hiſtorian, he boaſted that it was not in the power of the gods to dethrone him.

rael. Thus ſaith the Lord God, I will bring a ſword upon thee, and cut off man and beaſt out of thee, and the land of Egypt ſhall be deſolate and waſte, and they ſhall know that I am the Lord. He then foretels a ſtate of deſolation, which was to continue in Egypt forty years, after which he ſays, v. 14. 15. *they ſhall be a baſe kingdom. It ſhall be the baſeſt of the kingdoms, neither ſhall it exalt itſelf any more above the nations, for I will diminiſh them, that they ſhall no more rule over the nations.*

A ſhort time before Nebuchadnezzar's expedition, Ezekiel again propheſied as follows, Chap. xxx. 10. *I will alſo make the multitude of Egypt to ceaſe by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, he and his people with him. The terrible of the nations ſhall be brought to deſtroy the land, and they ſhall draw their ſwords againſt Egypt, and fill the land with the ſlain, and I will make the river dry*, and ſell the land into the hand of the wicked,*

* This is a figurative expreſſion, denoting probably that the river, of which this king made ſo great a boaſt, ſhould not avail him when he was invaded by his enemy. It ſhould be as eaſily paſſed, as if its channel had been dry.

wicked, and I will make the land waſte, and all that is therein by the hand of ſtrangers. I the Lord have ſpoken it. Thus ſaith the Lord God, I will alſo deſtroy the idols, and I will cauſe their images to ceaſe out of Noph, and there ſhall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt, and I will put a fear in the land of Egypt.

The hiſtory of Egypt from that time to the preſent, which is more than two thouſand years, correſponds in a remarkable manner to this prediction; that country having been ever ſince under the dominion of foreigners, viz. the Babylonians, Perſians, Macedonians, Romans, Saracens, Mamluks, and Turks. And, judging from appearances, it is not at all probable that the Egyptians will ever recover their liberty, and have a king of their own. Indeed, Egypt has been ſo often conquered and enſlaved, ſo many perſons of foreign extraction have ſettled in it, that it muſt be hard to ſay who of the preſent inhabitants are of the ſtock of the antient Egyptians. But it is not probable that any native of the

the country, of whatever ſtock, will ever have the ſovereignty of it.

2. Iſaiah lived in the reign of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, about one hundred and fifty years before the conqueſts of Nebuchadnezzar, and more than two hundred before thoſe of Cyrus, while the kingdom of Babylon was inferior to that of the Aſſyrians, yet he foretold the fall of the Babylonian empire, in language peculiarly emphatical, and his predictions have been verified by the events in a moſt remarkable manner, ſome of the particulars not having taken place, till many ages had elapſed. Iſaiah xiii. 9. *Babylon the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees excellency, ſhall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It ſhall never be inhabited, neither ſhall it be dwelt in from generation to generation, neither ſhall the Arabian pitch his tent there; and their houſes ſhall be full of doleful creatures, and owls ſhall dwell there, and ſatyrs ſhall dance there, and wild beaſts of the iſlands* (that is foreign wild beaſts) *ſhall cry in their deſolate houſes, and dragons*

dragons in their pleaſant palaces, and the time is near to come, and her days ſhall not be prolonged. He alſo ſays, Chap. xiv. 22. *I will riſe up againſt them, ſaith the Lord of hoſts, and cut off from Babylon the name and remnant, and ſon, and nephew, ſaith the Lord. I will alſo make it a poſſeſſion for bitterns, and pools of water; and I will ſweep it with the beſom of deſtruction, ſaith the Lord of hoſts.* The prophet even mentioned the nations, then in their very infant ſtate, by which Babylon would be conquered, when he ſaid, chap. xxi. 2. *Go up Elam,* (i. e. Perſia) *beſiege, O Media,* for they were the Medes and Perſians in conjunction that overturned the Babylonian empire.

Jeremiah, who lived in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, at the time when the Babylonian empire was in its greateſt ſtrength and glory, propheſied to the ſame purport with Iſaiah, chap. 50. 'Lo, 'I will raiſe up, and cauſe to come up 'againſt Babylon, an aſſembly of great 'nations from the north country, and 'they ſhall ſet themſelves in array againſt 'her.

'her. From thence ſhe ſhall be taken. 'Becauſe of the wrath of the Lord it ſhall 'not be inhabited, but it ſhall be wholly 'deſolate. Every one that goeth by Ba-'bylon ſhall be aſtoniſhed, and hiſs at all 'her plagues, for it is a land of graven 'images, and they are mad upon their 'idols. Therefore the wild beaſts of the 'deſert, and the wild beaſts of the iſlands, 'ſhall dwell there, and the owls ſhall 'dwell therein, and it ſhall be no more 'inhabited for ever, neither ſhall it be 'dwelt in from generation to generation.'

This prophet alſo mentions the names of the future enemies of Babylon, chap. li. 11. 'The Lord ſhall raiſe up the ſpirit 'of the kings of the Medes; for his deviſe 'is againſt Babylon to deſtroy it.' The duration of the captivity of his country-men by the Babylonians, Jeremiah exact-ly foretold. After mentioning the con-queſts of this nation, he proceeds thus, chap. xxv. 11, 'Thoſe nations ſhall ſerve 'the king of Babylon ſeventy years, and 'it ſhall come to paſs, that when ſeventy

years

'years are accompliſhed, I will puniſh the 'king of Babylon, and that nation, ſaith 'the Lord.' Chap. xxix. 10, 'For thus 'ſaith the Lord, that after ſeventy years 'be accompliſhed at Babylon, I will viſit 'you, and perform my good word to-'wards you, in cauſing you to return to 'this place.'

The prophecies concerning the deſolation of Babylon were not fulfilled in their full extent, till long after the time of our Saviour. Babylon was taken by Cyrus exactly ſeventy years after the conqueſt of Judea; but it was not reduced to the ſtate mentioned in theſe prophecies but by ſlow degrees. Cyrus having taken the city by turning the river which flowed through it out of its channel, all the neighbourhood became marſhy and unhealthy. Diodorus Siculus, who wrote a little before the time of our Saviour, ſays, that the buildings of Babylon were then decayed, that only a ſmall part of it was inhabited, and that the reſt of the incloſure was employed in tillage. Pliny, who wrote in the

firſt

firſt century after Chriſt, ſays that Babylon was then reduced to ſolitude, being exhauſted by the neighbourhood of Seleucia, which was not far from it. Pauſanias, who wrote about the middle of the ſecond century, ſays, that "of Babylon the greateſt city that the ſun ever ſaw, there was "nothing remaining but the walls;' and Lucian, who wrote about the ſame time, ſays, that very ſoon it would, like Nineveh, be ſought for, and not be found. In the time of Jerom, who lived in the fourth century, the whole incloſure of the walls of Babylon was actually converted into a place for keeping wild beaſts, and was uſed for that and no other purpoſe by many of the kings of Perſia. At length, even the walls of this great city, ſo much celebrated for their height and thickneſs, were demoliſhed, but by whom is not known. About ſeven hundred years ago, Benjamin a Jew, found ſome remains of the ruins of Babylon, but people were afraid to go among them on account of the ſerpents and ſcorpions with which it ſwarmed,

ed, and at preſent it is not agreed among travellers, in what place the great city of Babylon ſtood. In this caſe, ſurely, there cannot be any pretence for ſaying that the prediction was ſubſequent to the event, and yet no event was ever more diſtinctly deſcribed.

What is perhaps, however, more remarkable ſtill, Iſaiah mentions *Cyrus* by name, as the conqueror of Babylon, and the perſon who was deſtined to favour the people of Iſrael, by ordering the rebuilding of Jeruſalem and the temple, though in his time they were both ſtanding. Iſa. lxiv. 22. ‘ Thus ſaith the Lord, thy re-
‘ deemer, and he that formed thee from
‘ the womb, I am the Lord that maketh
‘ all things, that ſtretcheth forth the hea-
‘ vens above, that ſpreadeth abroad the
‘ earth by myſelf; that ſaith to Jeruſalem,
‘ Thou ſhalt be inhabited, and to the cities
‘ of Judah, Ye ſhall be built, and I will
‘ raiſe up the decayed places thereof; that
‘ ſaith to the deep, Be dry, and I will
‘ dry up their rivers, that ſaith to Cyrus,
‘ he

'he is my ſhepherd, and ſhall perform all
'my pleaſure, even ſaying to Jeruſalem,
'thou ſhalt be built, and to the temple,
'thy foundation ſhall be laid. Thus ſaith
'the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus,
'whoſe right hand I have holden, to ſub-
'due nations before him, and I will looſe
'the loins of kings, to open before him
'the two-leaved gates. I will break in
'pieces the gates of braſs, and cut in ſun-
'der the bars of iron. And I will give thee
'the treaſures of darkneſs, and hidden
'riches of ſecret places, that thou mayeſt
'know that I the Lord, who call thee by
'thy name, am the God of Iſrael. I
'have ſurnamed thee though thou haſt
'not known me. I am the Lord, and
'there is none elſe. There is no god be-
'ſides me. I girded thee though thou
'haſt not known me; that they may know
'from the riſing of the ſun, and from
'the Weſt, that there is none beſides
'me. I am the Lord, and there is none
'elſe. I form the light, and create dark-

'neſs: I make peace, and create evil; I 'the Lord do all theſe things.'

3. Not leſs remarkably have the prophecies concerning Tyre, received their accompliſhment. In the eleventh year after the captivity of the Jews, which was before the ſiege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar, Ezekiel ſays, Chap. xxvi. 1. 'The 'word of the Lord came unto me, ſaying, 'Son of man, becauſe that Tyrus hath 'ſaid againſt Jeruſalem, Aha, ſhe is bro-'ken, that was the gate of the people, 'ſhe is turned unto me, I ſhall be repleniſh-'ed now ſhe is laid waſte. Therefore thus 'ſaith the Lord God, Behold I am againſt 'thee, O Tyrus, and will cauſe many na-'tions to come up againſt thee, and they 'ſhall deſtroy the walls of Tyrus, and 'break down her towers. I will alſo 'ſcrape her duſt from her, and make her 'like the top of a rock. It ſhall be a 'place for the ſpreading of nets in the 'midſt of the ſea, for I have ſpoken it 'ſaith the Lord God, and it ſhall become a

'ſpoil

'ſpoil to the nations.' It is added v. 14. 'Thou ſhall be built no more.'

When this prophecy was delivered Tyre was in its glory, probably the moſt wealthy and the ſtrongeſt city in the world. It was taken by Nebuchadnezzar, but not till it had ſuſtained a ſiege of thirteen years. That city was never rebuilt, but another on an iſland, at the diſtance of half a mile from the ſhore, which in time became as flouriſhing, and as powerful, as the former. This, however, was taken by Alexander the Great, and it never recovered itſelf. It is now a heap of ruins, viſited, not inhabited, by a few fiſhermen. A traveller, who, about a century ago gave an account of it, ſays that when he approached the ruins of Tyre, he found rocks ſtretched out into the ſea, and great ſtones ſcattered up and down on the ſhore, made clean ſmooth by the ſun, the waves, and the wind, and of no uſe but for the drying of fiſhermen's nets, many of which were at that time, ſpread upon them; ſo that the full completion of this prophecy, deli-

vered above two thouſand three hundred years ago, did not take place till within the laſt two or three centuries.

4. The prophecies of Daniel relate to the moſt diſtant times, even thoſe which we have not yet reached; but ſome of the great events indicated in them by emblems, and afterwards explained in words, have ſo evidently come to paſs, that for this, and no other reaſon, (which is merely taking the queſtion for granted, againſt the ſtrongeſt evidence, internal and external) it has been ſaid, that they muſt have been written after them.

To Nebuchadnezzar, chap. iv. was revealed in a viſion of a great image, conſiſting of different kinds of metal, overturned by a ſtone, which afterwards became a great mountain, filling the whole earth, the ſucceſſion of four great monarchies, of which his own was declared to be the firſt, and of which the laſt can be no other than the Roman, terminating in ten kingdoms, which now exiſt, after which is to come what is called *the kingdom*

of

of heaven, which will continue for ever, and this, according to many other accounts of it, is to be the reign of peace and righteouſneſs.

In another viſion, ſeen by Daniel himſelf, chap. vii. four great empires, and no doubt the ſame with the former, are repreſented by four beaſts, the laſt of which had ten horns, ſucceeded by the appearance of one like to the ſon of man, *to whom was given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom which ſhould* be univerſal and everlaſting. The firſt of theſe empires being the Babylonian, it is impoſſible not to interpret the ſucceeding ones to be the Perſian, the Macedonian, and the Roman, divided at laſt into ten kingdoms as before.

Farther than this, another power is deſcribed as ariſing among the ten kingdoms, in which the laſt of the four empires terminates, and by this it is almoſt impoſſible not to underſtand, the papal. *I conſidered the ten horns*, ſays Daniel, chap. vii. 8. *and behold there came up among them another little*

little horn, before whom were three of the firſt horns plucked up by the roots, and behold in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth ſpeaking great things, v. 21. *I beheld, and the ſame horn made war with the ſaints, and prevailed againſt them, until the antient of days came, and judgment was given to the ſaints of the Moſt High, and the time came that the ſaints poſſeſſed the kingdom.* In the interpretation of this, the angel ſays, v. 24. *The ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that ſhall ariſe, aud another ſhall ariſe after them, and he ſhall be diverſe from the firſt, and he ſhall ſubdue three kings. And he ſhall ſpeak great words againſt the Moſt High, and ſhall wear out the ſaints of the Moſt High, and think to change times and laws, and they ſhall be given into his hand until a time and times, and the dividing of time. But the judgment ſhall ſit, and they ſhall take away his dominion, to conſume and to deſtroy it unto the end.* The hiſtory of the popes, though I cannot now enter into the particulars, correſponds in a wonderful manner with this prediction, delivered unqueſtionably above a thouſand years before the event.

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In another viſion, chap. viii. a ram with two horns, the one higher than the other, of which the higheſt came up laſt, was deſtroyed by a he-goat, with one great horn between his eyes, which being broken off four others came up in its place. And in the interpretation it is expreſsly ſaid, that the ram with two horns repreſented the empire of the Medes and Perſians, of which the latter was more powerful than the former, though it was not ſo at the firſt, and that the he-goat repreſented the kingdom of the Grecians, that the great horn was the firſt king, and that after him four ſhould ſtand up out of the nation, but not in his power.

This viſion was in the reign of Belſhazzar, before the conqueſt of Babylon by the Medes and Perſians, while the Medes were by much the more powerful nation, and therefore long before the conqueſt of Perſia by Alexander, on whoſe death his dominions were divided among four of his generals. The remainder of this viſion, and others, which probably relate to times

that

that are yet future, have ſome difficulty in their interpretation, which time will probably clear up. But if Daniel deſcribed the empire of the Greeks or Macedonian, and much more that of the Romans, it cannot be queſtioned but that the events indicated in his writings, were ſubſequent to the prediction of them, and ſuch as no human ſagacity could at that time diſcover.

We find the cleareſt marks of a prophetic ſpirit in the New Teſtament, as well as in the Old. Jeſus, beſides foretelling his own death, and that by crucifixion, with all the circumſtances of indignity attending it, alſo his reſurrection and aſcenſion, appears by his parables, to have had a clear foreſight of the ſpread, and final prevalence, of his religion in the world, of the perſecution of his followers, the diſſention and miſchief of which it would for ſome time be the occaſion, and of the corruption of his doctrine. He alſo foretold in the cleareſt language, without any figure or parable, the deſtruction of Jeruſalem,

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the total demolition of the temple, and the deſolation of the country of Judea, with many ſigns of its near approach in that generation, when no other perſon of that nation, or any other, appears to have had the leaſt apprehenſion of ſuch events. The warning he gave his diſciples to flee out of the country on the approach of theſe calamitous times, was well underſtood by them, and was the means of ſaving them all; no Chriſtians being in Jeruſalem when it was beſieged and taken by Titus.

The apoſtle Paul forewarns Chriſtians of the riſe of a power in the Chriſtian church, which would advance higher claims than thoſe of any other earthly potentate, that he would gain his authority by artifice, and pretences to miracles, that he would recommend abſtinence from certain meats, and diſcourage marriage; but that it would be finally deſtroyed at the ſecond coming of Chriſt, 2 Theſſ. ii. 3. *Let no man deceive you by any means, for there muſt come a falling away,* or an apoſtacy, *firſt,* i. e. before the time of final judgment, *and that*

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man of ſin muſt be revealed, the ſon of perdition, who oppoſeth and exalteth himſelf above all that is called God, or that is worſhipped, ſo that he, as God, ſitteth in the temple of God, ſhewing himſelf that he is God---whom the Lord ſhall conſume with the ſpirit of his mouth, and ſhall deſtroy with the brightneſs of his coming; even him whoſe coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and ſigns, and lying wonders, and with all deceitfulneſs of unrighteouſneſs. 1 Tim. iv. 1. *The ſpirit ſpeaketh expreſsly, that in the latter times ſome ſhall depart from the faith, giving heed to ſeducing ſpirits and doctrines of demons---forbidding to marry, and commanding to abſtain from meats, which God has created to be received with thankſgiving.* A farther deſcription of this ſame power, is given in the Revelation of John, with the ſteps by which it roſe, and the ſhocking uſe that would be made of its power, in the perſecution of the church. Certainly all theſe characters are to be found in the Pope, and the church of Rome, and what probability was there of the riſe of any ſuch power, at the time that the prophe-

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cies were delivered? This apoſtle alſo gives a ſketch of the moſt intereſting events of every kind, from his own time to the end of the world. But as, for evident reaſons, this prophecy is delivered in figurative language, and emblems, its correſpondence with the events cannot be expected to be apparent, till after they have taken place. And therefore it is not much for the purpoſe of my preſent argument, though I think that till pretty near to the preſent times, the correſpondence will be ſufficiently evident to the impartial and candid.

But without any regard to theſe predictions, which are acknowledged to be better calculated to confirm the faith of the believer, than to convert unbelievers, the prophecies I have enumerated, though few in compariſon of what might have been adduced, will ſatisfy any reaſonable perſon, that they muſt have been dictated by a foreſight more than human, and therefore that the Jewiſh and Chriſtian religions, having the ſame author, muſt be of divine authority.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XII.

Internal Evidence of Jeſus being no Impoſtor.

We are in him that is true, even in his Son Jeſus Chriſt.

1 JOHN, v. 20.

BESIDES the evidence of *miracles*, including that of *prophecy*, which is the proper ſeal of God to any thing that is alleged to come from him, with which we become acquainted by hiſtory, or tradition, and which is uſually called the *external evidence* of divine revelation, there is another kind of evidence properly denominated *internal*, which to thoſe who have a ſufficient knowledge of human nature and human life, is hardly leſs ſatisfactory. For knowing what men are, and what men have done, we readily judge what is probable or improbable, poſſible or impoſſible,

ſible, with reſpect to the deſigns and actions of men; and if any thing be aſſerted of a man, and eſpecially of a number of men, which we well know could not be aſſerted with truth of any man, or any number of men, with whom we were ever acquainted, or concerning whom we have had any authentic information, we do not heſitate to pronounce it to be highly improbable, and perhaps abſolutely impoſſible.

It is, therefore, of the greateſt importance, that we apply the knowledge we have of human nature, and human life, in our ſtudy of the evidences of divine revelation, to attend accurately to the characters and circumſtances of Moſes and the prophets, of Chriſt and the apoſtles, that we may form a judgment whether what is related of them, on the ſuppoſition of their having had divine communications, or of their having been impoſtors, be probable or otherwiſe. Having in a former ſet of diſcourſes conſidered the circumſtances of the hiſtory of Moſes, I ſhall in this conſider the hiſtory of Jeſus;

ſus; and I think it will appear, that, if what is, and muſt be, allowed concerning him be true, it was abſolutely impoſſible that he ſhould have been an impoſtor, every thing related of him being perfectly natural on the idea of his being conſcious to himſelf, or fully perſuaded in his own mind, of his having a divine miſſion, but in the higheſt degree unnatural, and even impoſſible, on the idea of his having been an impoſtor. That he was a mere *enthuſiaſt*, and really imagined that he had a divine miſſion when he had none, is another queſtion, which I ſhall conſider only incidentally. This indeed was evidently impoſſible in ſuch a caſe as this, and will not, I am perſuaded, be ſuppoſed by any unbeliever; ſo that if Jeſus was no impoſtor, and did not know that he was deceiving his followers and the world, his divine miſſion muſt be acknowledged.

1. If we conſider the nature and extent of the undertaking of Jeſus, it muſt appear highly improbable that it ſhould have

have occurred to a perſon of his country, and of his low birth, and education. Had his views, whatever they were, extended no farther than his own country, is undertaking any thing that ſhould bring him into notice, and advance him in life, (which is all that an impoſtor can be ſuppoſed to aim at) muſt have appeared very unlikely to ſucceed, and conſequently muſt have been very unlikely to enter into his thoughts, and have been undertaken by him. With the Jews, the place of a man's birth was a circumſtance of no ſmall moment, and Jeſus was of Nazarreth, eſteemed a mean place, in a deſpiſed part of the country, ſo that, on this account, he muſt have lain under great diſadvantage; and his occupation, which was that of a carpenter, without any advantage of education, ſuch as his country afforded, muſt have made his undertaking much more difficult. In theſe circumſtances, ambition ſo prepoſterous as that of Jeſus, muſt have bordered on inſanity or infatuation, which muſt have appeared in his conduct.

conduct. But nothing of this kind *does* appear in him. Exclusive of the language suited to his undertaking, there was nothing like extravagance in his words or actions. On the contrary, his whole behaviour shewed a mind perfectly composed and rational, and what is more, there was not in him any thing of ostentation, but the most amiable humility and modesty, though accompanied with becoming dignity.

Whatever we may think of a Jewish education, and Jewish literature, they were highly valued by Jews, and must have been necessary to gain general esteem, especially with the higher classes of men, and for the purpose of acting any conspicuous part in that country. Jesus himself could not but have found, and have felt, this disadvantage; and if he had not been deterred by it from his undertaking, he must have had such an immoderate and absurd conceit of himself, as could not but have appeared in his general conduct, and must have exposed him to contempt. Such is always the case if any person in similar

ſimilar circumſtances with us attempt any thing above his ſphere of life. It frequently happens that men of no education, and, even of low occupations, ſtep out of their ſphere, and become preachers, but they are ſeldom attended to, except by perſons like themſelves, and they generally appear ridiculous in the eyes of others. But ſuch was not the caſe with Jeſus. He was revered and dreaded, by the chief perſons of his nation; and the contempt they ſometimes expreſſed for him was either affected, or conceived before they had ſufficient knowledge of him. The manner in which they at length proceeded againſt him, ſhews that they were moſt ſeriouſly alarmed, and thought their own credit and ſafety depended on their deſtroying him.

Some perſons deſtitute of the advantages of birth and education, have great natural talents, which ſupply their place, and give them great influence. But Jeſus does not appear to have had any advantage of this kind. Like Moſes, he was neither

an orator, nor a warrior. He could, indeed, ſpeak pertinently upon proper occaſions, and he diſcovered great preſence of mind incritical circumſtances. But this is not very uncommon, and there was nothing in his manner of ſpeaking to captivate an audience, by moving the paſſions. He never attempted any thing of the kind, and the admiration with which his diſcourſes were heard, was excited not by any thing that we call *eloquence*, but by the importance of what he delivered, and and his authoritative manner of ſpeaking, which a conſcioufneſs of a divine miſſion naturally gave him. It is evident that he avoided as much as poſſible all occaſions of drawing a crowd after him, and when, from the fame of his miracles, this was unavoidable, he always withdrew as ſoon, and as privately, as he could.

2. If we conſider what it was that Jeſus undertook, we ſhall find that it was of a nature leaſt of all calculated to ſtrike and captivate the Jews. All that we know of them, of their general character and

and views, make it evident that the only perſon likely to gain their favourable attention was one who would perſonate their *Meſſiah*, who was then expected to make his appearance, to deliver them from the ſtate of ſubjection they were then under to the Romans, and to give them the empire of the world. Except Jeſus himſelf, and his forerunner John the Baptiſt, no other perſon ever gained any conſiderable number of followers among the Jews, who did not flatter their ambition, by advancing that pretention, or in ſome other form erected the ſtandard of liberty among them. But with theſe pretenſions they never failed to gain many followers in that nation. Jeſus, however, eſtabliſhed a permanent intereſt in the affections of thouſands of that country, all prepoſſeſſed with the idea of a temporal deliverer (at firſt, indeed, fondly hoping that *he* was the perſon) though he carefully diſclaimed all ſuch pretences. And what is more extraordinary, his diſciples and followers in-

creaſed after his death, when every idea of that kind muſt have been given up.

By ſetting himſelf alike againſt the Phariſees and Sadducees, Jeſus not only rendered himſelf obnoxious to all the higher orders of perſons in the country, but muſt have been leſs likely to ſucceed even with the common people, by whom the Phariſees were held in the higheſt eſteem. Indeed, it cannot be ſaid that there was any claſs or deſcription of perſons to whom he paid court, or was at all ſtudious to recommend himſelf. One of his diſcourſes to the people was of ſuch a nature, that all his audience left him, except the twelve apoſtles, and yet he was not concerned or diſcouraged by it; but, turning to the twelve, he calmly ſaid, *Will ye alſo go away?* Of what kind, then, muſt have been the ambition of Jeſus, which was equally independent of the favour of the great, and of that of the commonality? What could he have expected but univerſal contempt?

A Jew,

A Jew, whoſe object had been to draw attention as a prophet, would naturally have aſſumed the habit and manner of the antient prophets of that nation, which had in them much of auſterity. And by this means John the Baptiſt, who did not pretend to work miracles, was highly and generally reſpected. But Jeſus, though with that example before him, adopted a very different manner. He appears to have dreſſed, and to have lived, like other perſons, without any peculiarity whatever. Whenever he was invited, he did not decline being preſent at entertainments, and his preſence does not appear to have been at any time a check upon their innocent feſtivity. This was ſo much the caſe, that his enemies ſaid of him, that he was *a gluttonous man and a winebibber*, as well as a *friend of publicans and ſinners*.

Beſides, that, in a civil reſpect, the appearance and pretenſions of Jeſus were ill adapted to favour any ambitious views, he taught nothing with reſpect to religion that

that was likely to recommend him to his countrymen. He did not pretend to teach any doctrine that was properly new, but his expoſing of the abſurd comments of the authoriſed expounders of the law of Moſes, together with their perſonal vices, was certainly hazardous. The general object of his preaching was to inculcate the ſtricteſt and pureſt morality, ſuch as is found in the antient prophets. But he drew the attention of his hearers in a more particular manner to *a future ſtate*, much more than had been done by any of the prophets who had preceded him.

The doctrine of a reſurrection was at that time the general belief of the Jewiſh nation, as it continues to be at this day. But what he aſſerted of himſelf being appointed to raiſe all the dead, and to judge the world, muſt have appeared in the higheſt degree extravagant, and revolting, without the moſt evident teſtimonials of a divine authority for ſuch high pretenſions. What could an impoſtor, who muſt have known that he had no authority for ſuch a claim,

claim, if ſuch an idea could have been entertained by him (which, however muſt be confeſſed to be very improbable) have expected, but that, on the firſt hearing of ſuch pretenſions, his audience would have turned from him with deriſion. His pretending to a kingdom, and a kingdom not of this world, but in another, after he ſhould be dead, was alſo more likely to expoſe him to contempt, than to procure him reſpect. And this declaration was made by Jeſus when he was before a court of judicature, expecting immediate death. That, notwithſtanding theſe circumſtances, Jeſus did not appear an object of contempt, but attracted the moſt reſpectful attention, and had many diſciples while living, and many more after he was dead, has ſurely in it ſomething very extraordinary, and well deſerving to be enquired into; great effects always implying great cauſes. All theſe circumſtances certainly ſhew that Jeſus was conſcious to himſelf of having advantages ſufficient to counterbalance all the diſadvantages he lay under, and his

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ſucceſs proves that he was really poſſeſſed of them.

3. Still more extraordinary was it that ſuch a perſon as Jeſus ſhould have extended his views beyond his own country, as it is evident that he did when he directed his diſciples *to proſelyte and baptize all nations*, and when he foretold the univerſal ſpread of his religion, which, though inconſiderable in its riſe, like a grain of muſtard ſeed, or a ſmall quantity of leaven, was deſtined to embrace the whole world. No other Jew, of any rank or character, had talked in this manner before; and conſidering the extreme contempt in which the Jews muſt have known that they were held by other nations, except by the few whom they had proſelyted, any Jew muſt have known that a perſon of his nation undertaking any thing conſiderable, was likely to meet with the worſt reception, and nothing more offenſive, or more hazardous, could have been undertaken by any man.

The object of the religion of Jeſus, was nothing leſs than to overturn all the eſtabliſhed

eſtabliſhed ſyſtems of religion then ſubſiſting in the world, ſyſtems always moſt intimately connected with civil policy, and as ſuch moſt vigilantly guarded by all the power of the reſpective ſtates, and, as was then univerſally thought, with the greateſt reaſon; it being taken for granted, that their temporal proſperity depended upon the obſervance of the rites tranſmitted to all nations by their remote anceſtors. The philoſophers, who deſpiſed theſe rites, never ventured to hint at the propriety, or the ſafety, of diſcontinuing them; and the few who incautiouſly ſpake with diſreſpect of them were charged with atheiſm, and had been put to death, or baniſhed. We may, and juſtly do, laugh at the religion of the Greeks and Romans, and that of the reſt of the heathen world, as ſyſtems of the moſt wretched ſuperſtition; but they were ſerious things with themſelves; and beſides their reputed ſacredneſs, and the general dread of a neglect of them, they mixed with all their habits of life.

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In all antient nations all occaſions of joy or ſorrow, and almoſt every tranſaction of a civil nature, partook of their religion; but more eſpecially was every ſeaſon of feſtivity, to which they were moſt paſſionately attached, a religious act. Even the theatrical exhibitions of the Greeks and Romans, calculated to entertain perſons of the moſt refined taſte, as well as the feſtivals of Bacchus and Venus, which gratified the lewdeſt and moſt debauched of the vulgar, were equally in honour of their gods. Alſo all their moſt admired poems were with them, as with other nations, tinctured with their religion; ſo that without a knowledge of their religion, it is not now poſſible to underſtand them. I cannot, indeed, give a juſt idea of the extreme difficulty of the undertaking to overturn the religion of the ſeveral ſtates of antiquity, without entering into a detail of particulars, too long for any diſcourſe. Only perſons well acquainted with antiquity, will ever conceive it.

This

This being the caſe, to change the religion of a people was, in a manner, to make them over again. To ſubdue them by force of arms muſt have appeared much more eaſy. There is not, indeed, a ſingle inſtance in all antient hiſtory, of a nation changing their religion from perſuaſion or example. It is what the greateſt calamities, and the approach of extermination has not been able to effect. The caſe of the Jews is the only exception on record. For they were ever ready to adopt the religion of the neighbouring nations. But then their remote anceſtors in Meſopotamia, according to Joſhua, and themſelves in Egypt, had been addicted to them. Though the Egyptians ſaw the inability of their gods to ſave them from a ſeries of the greateſt calamities, and though the Canaanites found that theirs could not prevent their expulſion from their country, and their almoſt extermination, both the Egyptians and the remains of the Canaanites, appear to have continued as much attached to their ſeveral religions

ligions as ever. They would rather ſuppoſe that their gods were angry with them, and had for that time deſerted them, than imagine that they had not been *able* to defend them, or that the gods of other nations (whoſe power they never called in queſtion) had in that particular prevailed over theirs. For no heathen nation in all antiquity excluded the agency of ſuperior powers in any event, public or private. The events of battles, though moſt evidently depending on the conduct of the generals, and the valour of the combatants, were always aſcribed to the ſecret interference of the gods.

The prophet Jeremiah, expreſſes in very emphatical language, the extraordinary caſe of the Iſraelites in revolting from their religion, Chap. ii. 10. *Paſs over the iſles of Chittim, and ſee, and ſend unto Kedar, and conſider diligently, and ſee if there be ſuch a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods; but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit.*

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In thoſe circumſtances, ſuch an undertaking as that of Jeſus, of the magnitude of which it is not eaſy for us at this day to form an idea, muſt ſurely have appeared impoſſible to a Jewiſh carpenter. Or if, from ignorance, he had conceived ſuch an idea, he, or his followers, would ſoon have found the impracticability of it, without divine aid. Jeſus himſelf did not go beyond the bounds of his own country, but no ſooner did the apoſtles begin to preach to other nations, and appeared to be ſomething different from Jews (whoſe privileges and cuſtoms had been long tolerated, without any ſerious inconvenience ariſing from it) than they found, that if they perſiſted, it muſt be at the hazard of every thing dear to them in life, and of life itſelf. And with theſe difficulties the preachers of chriſtianity actually ſtruggled about three hundred years; when the whole ſyſtem of heatheniſm, which had prevailed from time immemorial, in the whole extent of the Roman empire, having been gradually undermined, gave way

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on the converſion of Conſtantine; and from that time, nothing, as we may ſay, remained of it, but ruins, which alſo crumbled away and diſappeared in about three hundred years more. And now nothing more remains of the worſhip of Jupiter and Juno, Apollo or Bacchus, than if it had never exiſted. Theſe celebrated deities are gone into oblivion, together with Baal of the Canaanites, Iſis and Oriſis of the Egyptians, and Thor and Woden in Europe. It is only in hiſtory, and the books in which they are mentioned, that the memory of them, and of the horrid and abominable rites with which they were worſhipped, is preſerved. What could have accompliſhed ſo great a revolution, a revolution far more aſtoniſhing than any that has ever been effected by policy or by arms, but a power not leſs than divine, accompanying Jeſus and the apoſtles?

The revolution produced by Mahomet had nothing it in approaching to this. He did not queſtion the divine origin of the

the Jewiſh or Chriſtian religions. He only pretended that his own was derived from the ſame ſource, ſo that he had no occaſion to work any miracles. Idolaters, indeed (who, however, do not appear to have been very numerous) he ſubdued by force, but Jews and Chriſtians, unable to treat them in the ſame manner, he tolerated. When the Mahometan power was fully eſtabliſhed, and the caliphs of Bagdat had long made the greateſt figure of any princes in the Eaſtern world, and their ſubjects had attained a high degree of civilization, ſome Tartar nations emerging from barbariſm, adopted their religion; as the Tartars who conquered China, adopted the inſtitutions of the Chineſe, and the Romans the literature and philoſophy of the Greeks. In this there is nothing at all extraordinary. But the Greeks and Romans changed their religion for the Chriſtian when they were the moſt learned and civilized, and the Jews, in their opinion, the moſt ignorant, and the moſt deſpiſed of all nations, and the preach-

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ers of chriſtianity were at firſt of the moſt illiterate of that deſpiſed nation. This is a fact that cannot be contradicted; and having no parallel in the hiſtory of mankind, is certainly deſerving of particular attention.

3. With all theſe difficulties before him, from the nature of his undertaking, and the people whom he had to gain to his purpoſe, Jeſus promiſed to his diſciples nothing at all in this world, but only in another. On the contrary, he frequently apprized them, that if they adhered to him, they had nothing to expect in this life, but perſecution; and many of them that violent death to which he himſelf was deſtined. This is a kind of conduct which muſt certainly be deemed in the higheſt degree prepoſterous, and unaccountable, in an impoſtor, who, whatever he gave out, could not have had a view to any thing but ſome advantage in this life. It muſt have been to ſacrifice himſelf and his followers, for whom it is evident he had the greateſt affection, for no advan-

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tage whatever, to himſelf or them, which is what any man muſt pronounce to be abſolutely impoſſible.

That a great number of perſons ſhould deliberately abandon themſelves to perſecution and certain death, in order to eſtabliſh a ſcheme which they conceived to be favourable to the happineſs of mankind, is not to be admitted. That a ſingle perſon ſhould devote himſelf to preſent death, when immediate and great glory would certainly accrue to himſelf, and an ample recompence to his family, is poſſible, though examples of it are uncertain and rare. But that many perſons ſhould do this, when the proſpect of fame to themſelves, and of advantage to their families, was diſtant and uncertain, and when for the preſent, and an indefinite length of time, contempt would be joined to their other ſufferings, is impoſſible while human nature is what we know it to be. Such conduct would be deemed to be nothing leſs than *inſanity;* and that a number of perſons ſhould be inſane in exactly the ſame way, and infect thou-

ſands with the ſame ſpecies of the diſorder, would be moſt miraculous.

That Jeſus *did* expect a violent death for himſelf, and that he apprized his followers that many of them muſt expect the ſame, appears from the whole courſe of his hiſtory. It was not a thought that occurred to him only juſt before his death, and which he had not time to reflect upon; but it appears that it was what he had ſteadily in view, ſo as to have had an opportunity of conſidering it in all its terrors, and all its conſequences, from the very beginning of his miniſtry, and what he in good time informed his diſciples of. Some time before his laſt journey to Jeruſalem, it is ſaid, Matt. xvi. 21. *From that time began Jeſus to ſhew to his diſciples how that he muſt go up to Jeruſalem, and ſuffer many things of the elders, and chief prieſts, and the ſcribes, and be killed, and be raiſed again the third day.* This, as was natural, ſtaggered his diſciples, who at that time expected preferment in the kingdom which they believed he was about to erect, and Peter ſaid unto him,

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This be far from thee Lord. But Jeſus, ſo far from palliating the matter, and endeavouring to ſoften it, and reconcile their minds to it, replied, *Get thee behind me ſatan, thou art an offence unto me. For thou ſavoureſt not the things that are of God, but thoſe that be of men;* and turning to his diſciples, he ſaid, *If any man will come after me, let him take up his croſs and follow me. For whoſoever will ſave his life, ſhall loſe it, and whoſoever will loſe his life for my ſake ſhall find it.* On another occaſion he ſaid, Matt. x. 38. *He that taketh not his croſs and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.* On all proper occaſions he clearly apprized his diſciples that in this world they had nothing better to expect than the treatment that he himſelf met with. For when the ſons of Zebedee, James and John, applied to him for the chief ſeats in his kingdom, he ſaid, Matt. xx. 22. *Ye know not what ye aſk. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I ſhall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptiſm that I ſhall be baptiſed with?* And when they ſaid, *we are able,* he ſaid, *Ye ſhall indeed drink of my cup, and be baptized with the bap-*

tiſm that I am baptized with. When he foretold the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, he ſaid to the apoſtles, Matt. xxiv. 9. *Then ſhall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and ſhall kill you, and ye ſhall be hated of all men for my name's ſake.* By way of encouragement to bear all this, he could only ſay, and this he did in his firſt public diſcourſe from the mount, Matt. v. 10. *Bleſſed are they that are perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Bleſſed are ye when men ſhall revile you, and perſecute you, and ſay all manner of evil againſt you falſely for my ſake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.*

What could any man expect from this mode of addreſs, from which Jeſus never varied, but that his hearers, who looked for nothing but worldly advantage (which at firſt was the caſe of the apoſtles themſelves) finding that he had nothing of that kind to offer them, would turn from him with indignation and contempt. Diſappointed in their fond proſpects, what could have kept them with him but a firm perſuaſion

ſuaſion that he had a divine miſſion, and therefore that it was their duty to follow him implicitly, confident that, in ſome way or other, of which they had no idea, they would in the end find their account in it. Notwithſtanding his perſiſting in diſclaiming all pretenſions of a temporal nature, they did not abandon the expectations they had entertained; ſtill flattering themſelves that though he did not acquaint them with it, he would at a proper time aſſume kingly power. But when he was apprehended as a malefactor, which did not at all ſurprize or diſconcert *him*, they *all forſook him and fled*; while he with a painful and ignominous death before his eyes, met his dreadful fate with the greateſt compoſure, and went through the whole of the trying ſcene without giving the leaſt ſuſpicion that he wiſhed to avoid it. Naturally indeed he did, and therefore he prayed that *the bitter cup might paſs from him*. But he immediately added, *but not as I will, but as thou wilt*. Surely this behaviour was very unlike that of an impoſtor.

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This was far from being the conduct of Mahomet. Beſides promiſing his followers the enjoyment of every luxury of life, and eſpecially that of women (free, as he frequently repeats it, from impurity,) he did not fail to hold out to them ſomething worth fighting for in this world. Neither himſelf, nor any of his immediate followers, were voluntary martyrs to their religion.

As Jeſus did not fail to apprize his followers of the dangers, and the inconvenience, to which their adherence to him would expoſe them, he did not conceal the great evils which would attend the propogation of his religion, though it would ultimately be in the higheſt degree beneficial to the world, and would finally prevail in it. *Think not*, ſays he, Matt. x. 30, *that I am come to ſend peace on earth. I came not to ſend peace, but a ſword. For I am come to ſet a man at variance againſt his father, and the daughter againſt her mother, and the daughter-in-law againſt her mother-in-law, and a man's foes ſhall be they of his own houſehold,*

v. 21.

v. 21. *The brother ſhall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and children ſhall riſe up againſt their parents and cauſe them to be put to death, and ye ſhall be hated of all men for my name's ſake.* Surely ſuch diſcourſes as this was not likely to recommend his religion, or invite followers.

4. An artful impoſtor, would probably have *ſecrets* and confidental friends, to whom he would intruſt what he did not chooſe to communicate to others, though this is not neceſſary to every impoſtor. But Jeſus had no ſecrets, nor does there appear to have been any perſons to whom he communicated what he concealed from others. When his audience diſcovered great perverſeneſs, and a diſpoſition to cavil, he ſpake to them in parables, but he afterwards explained the meaning of them to his apoſtles, one of whom was Judas, who, as he betrayed him, would, no doubt, have divulged whatever he had known to his prejudice. In the general inſtructions which Jeſus gave his apoſtles, he directed them to publiſh to the world every thing

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that they had heard from him without exception. Matt. x. 27. *What I tell you in darkneſs, that ſpeak ye in the light; and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye on the houſe tops.*

The only ſecret that Jeſus had, was not his pretenſions to a divine miſſion (for this he always openly aſſerted, and appealed to his miracles for the evidence of it) but to his being the Meſſiah, announced in the antient prophets. But this was only for fear of exciting an alarm which would have done no good, and at a proper time he declared this to all the apoſtles, and to Judas among them. After his reſurrection and aſcenſion, this was no ſecret to any perſon. He alſo avowed it in the moſt ſolemn manner at his trial before the high-prieſt.

5. Jeſus diſcovered no anxiety about the evidence of his divine miſſion, which would have been natural to a perſon who had been conſcious to himſelf that he was unable to produce any that was ſatisfactory. This anxiety appears through the whole of the

the Koran. Mahomet's aſſertion of his divine miſſion, of the chapters in the Koran being ſent to him from heaven, his denunciations of the wrath of God, and of hell-fire to the unbelievers, are repeated without end, ſo as to be tireſome in the extreme. What he wanted in evidence he endeavoured to ſupply by confident aſſertions, and this, together with the ſucceſs of the battles that he fought ſufficiently anſwered his purpoſe. To theſe he appealed, and his followers, no doubt, thought that God would not give ſuch ſucceſs to a mere impoſtor.

On the contrary, Jeſus never, of his own accord, ſaid any thing about his miſſion, leaving it to thoſe who ſaw his miracles to make the neceſſary inference from them. He contented himſelf with anſwering objections as they were made to him; and as his miracles were never queſtioned, he eaſily ſhewed the abſurdity of every thing that was objected to them, eſpecially that of his caſting out demons by Beelzebub. With great dignity he obſerv-

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ed, on one of theſe occaſions, John x. 25. that *the works which his father gave him to do, bare witneſs of him*; and in anſwer to the clamorous demand of a ſign from heaven, he referred them Matt. xii. 39. to the ſign of the prophet Jonas, ſaying that as Jonas had been three days in the belly of a fiſh, he ſhould remain ſo long in the ſtate of the dead, and riſe again on the third day; which it appears that his enemies well underſtood, by the precautions they took to prevent any impoſition with reſpect to it.

How natural was this conduct on the ſuppoſition of Jeſus having been conſcious to himſelf that he had a commiſſion from God, and that the evidence of it, which was conſtantly before the world, was ſufficient to ſatisfy any unprejudiced perſon. Had he been conſcious that his pretenſions were deſtitute of any ſolid proof, he would naturally have made the moſt of any fallacious appearance of evidence that he could produce, as Mahomet did of his victory of Beder, and the excellence of the compoſition of the Koran.

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6. The piety obſervable in the character of Jeſus is alone a proof, to thoſe who give due attention to the human character, that he was no impoſtor. That he was actuated by the genuine ſentiments of piety, appeared in all his diſcourſes, and the whole of his conduct. He not only always declared that *he came to do the will of God who ſent him*, and (John viv. 10.) that *the father within him did the works*, which evidenced his divine miſſion; but it is evident that, as the Pſalmiſt ſaid, *God was in all his thoughts*, and that to his will he was at all times reſigned. It was, as we read, John iv. 34, *his meat and drink to do the will of him that ſent him*. He was frequent and earneſt in *prayer*, and taught his diſciples to pray, to avoid oſtentation in prayer, Matt. vi. 6. to *go into their cloſets*, and *ſhutting the doors*, pray *to their father, who*, he ſaid, *ſaw in ſecret*. Such a reverence for God, and devotedneſs to his will, in life and in death, as Jeſus diſcovered, is abſolutely incompatible with falſe pretenſions to a miſſion from him, whatever might be his object in the impoſture. It muſt have appeared

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to him as the extreme of arrogance and impiety, ſuch as could not fail to draw after it the divine diſpleaſure, and the heavieſt judgments.

No perſon can read the New Teſtament, and imagine that Jeſus was an atheiſt, or an unbeliever in a future ſtate of righteous retribution. Indeed, it is not probable that there were any proper unbelievers among the Jews in his time. Even the Sadducees were believers in the being and moral government of God, and in the divine miſſion of Moſes. But Jeſus was not a Sadducee. He was, without all queſtion, a ſincere believer in the doctrine that he taught. And that he was ſuch an enthuſiaſt as to imagine that he had thoſe ſupernatural communications to which he pretended without having them, is even more improbable than the ſuppoſition of his having been an impoſtor. If ever man was in his *right mind*, and knew what he was about, it was Jeſus. All his diſcourſes and actions diſcover the greateſt calmneſs and compoſure, and ſavour nothing of extravagance, which ſo egregious

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an enthuſiaſt could not always have concealed. All his diſcourſes are perfectly rational, and his whole conduct was of a piece with them; ſo that, if he had no divine miſſion, he muſt have been not an *enthuſiaſt*, who had impoſed upon himſelf, but properly an *impoſtor*, who endeavoured to impoſe upon the world; and whether this ſuppoſition be at all tenable, let any perſon, at all acquainted with human nature, now judge.

Beſides the piety of Jeſus, he was evidently a man of great benevolence, and had a ſtrong ſentiment of friendſhip for his apoſtles and others. And it cannot be ſuppoſed that ſuch a perſon would purpoſely deceive and miſlead his countrymen and friends. Impoſtors have callous hearts. Intent upon their ſchemes, they are deaf to ever other conſideration.

Jeſus gave many proofs of the ſtrongeſt and tendereſt affection. When he came within ſight of Jeruſalem, he *wept over it*, in the proſpect of the calamities that awaited it. He wept at the grave of Lazarus,

zarus, and his diſcourſes to his apoſtles a little before his death diſcover the moſt amiable ſympathy, and concern, without the leaſt regard to his own approaching ſufferings. He was only occupied with the idea of what they would feel when he was removed from them. We ſee nothing like this in the conduct of Mahomet.

Though Jeſus affected no auſterity, he was free from all ſenſual indulgence, which was by no means the caſe of Mahomet; and he certainly did not aim at temporal power, but reſolutely declined ſeveral propoſals of the multitude to make him a king. What, then, could an impoſtor, without ambition, or perſonal indulgence, aim at? Jeſus, being a man, muſt have had ſome ſuch objects as other men have; but there was nothing that other men moſt covet that his conduct was at all adapted to gain. He muſt, therefore, have had views of a higher nature. On any other hypotheſis his conduct is abſolutely unaccountable; but on the ſuppoſition of his being conſcious of having a divine miſſion, and of a ſtation

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of honour and power deſtined for him in a future world, all his diſcourſes, and his whole conduct, are perfectly natural. *For the joy that was ſet before him* (Heb. xii. 2.) *he endured the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame* of that ignominous death; but that he ſhould have done this without having had in view any thing that any other man ever thought worth purſuing, is not to be ſuppoſed of him, or of any man.

Let all theſe circumſtances be duly conſidered, the obſcure birth, and mean occupation of Jeſus, in a diſtant and deſpiſed country, his high pretenſions to be the Jewiſh Meſſiah, without any aſſumption of kingly power, univerſally deemed to be moſt eſſential to that character, his claim to a kingdom though not of this world, and to the power of raiſing the dead and judging the world, when he had nothing but the certain proſpect of a violent death before him; his undertaking to overthrow all the religions of the heathen world, firmly attached as the ſeveral nations were to them, religions which had kept their ground

ground from time immemorial, notwithſtanding a long period now boaſted of as the moſt enlightened of any till the preſent; when there had not been from the beginning of the world an example of any nation voluntarily changing their religion; his holding out to his diſciples nothing but perſecution in this world, and happineſs in another; his having no ſecrets; his diſcovering no anxiety about the evidences of his divine miſſion, joined with his calm good ſenſe, his exalted piety, his general benevolence, and the ſtrong affection he always ſhewed to his friends and followers; let all theſe circumſtances, I ſay, be conſidered and, without attending to his miracles, and his ſucceſs, it muſt ſurely be thought impoſſible that this man could have been an impoſtor, and meant to deceive the world. This *internal* evidence added to the *external*, on which I have already enlarged, viz. from *miracles*, and *prophecy*, muſt be abundantly ſufficient to ſatisfy any reaſonable and candid inquirer, with reſpect to the truth of chriſtianity, and of revealed religion in general.

DISCOURSE XIII.

The moral influence of Chriſtian Principles.

If ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them.
JOHN. xiii. 17.

IN the Diſcourſes which I have already delivered, on the ſubject of *the evidences of revealed religion*, I firſt endeavoured to ſhew the value of *religion in general*, then the ſuperior value of *revealed* religion, compared with that which is called *natural*. After this I gave you a view of the ſtate of the heathen world with reſpect to religion, and to philoſophy alſo as connected with religion; and the great ſuperiority of the ſyſtem of Moſes, which has been moſt objected to by unbelievers, in both thoſe reſpects. I then proceeded to explain the direct, or *external*, evidence of the Jewiſh

and chriſtian religions, from *miracles*, and from *prophecy*; and in the laſt place, as a part of the *internal* evidence, I ſhewed, from the circumſtances of the hiſtory of Jeſus, the impoſſibility of his having been an impoſtor.

Having thus finiſhed the *argumentative* part of my undertaking, I now proceed to conclude the whole with ſome obſervations of a *practical* nature.

1. If revealed religion be *true*, it muſt be of great *importance*, and demand our cloſeſt attention. It may well, indeed, be preſumed, that if the divine Being, the great author of univerſal nature, has interpoſed in ſo extraordinary a manner as has been repreſented, in a ſcheme commencing with our firſt parents, carried on through the diſpenſation of Moſes, continued by Jeſus Chriſt, and to be reſumed at his ſecond coming, the object muſt be ſomething of the greateſt importance to the duty and the happineſs of man; and it cannot be without hazard to ourſelves if we neglect, and reject it.

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The moſt intereſting article in the ſcheme of revelation is the doctrine of a *future ſtate*. And ſurely, if there really be a future ſtate for man, if it be of much longer continuance than the preſent, eſpecially if it is to laſt for ever, and if our well being in that ſtate will depend on our behaviour in this, it behoves us to pay much more attention to it, than to any thing in this ſhort and tranſitory life. Did any perſon now living in this country certainly know that he muſt ſoon leave it, and go to another, for example to France, where he had the proſpect of ſucceeding to a large eſtate, would he not be thinking of his voyage, and making preparations for it? Would he not be learning the French language, and endeavouring in every other way to provide for his enjoyment of life in that diſtant country? And would a man be commended for his prudence in this caſe, and blamed for ſuperſtition and folly in another caſe exactly ſimilar to it? Or would you not think a man inſane who ſhould forget a journey he was upon, and

take up with his inn; and not think it reaſonable that a man who believes he is travelling towards an eternal world, ſhould have his attention fixed upon *it*, and make light of any inconvenience he met with in his way thither?

Surely, then, it becomes Chriſtians, who profeſs themſelves to be *pilgrims and ſtrangers* here, and *citizens of heaven*, to be thinking of their proper country, and preparing for their remove to it.

Men of the world naturally ſay, *let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die*. This is the great burden of the ſong with all the heathen poets. But the Chriſtian as naturally ſays with the apoſtle Paul, Phil. iv. 5. *Let your moderatiou be known unto all men, the Lord is at hand.*

To uſe one example more. If you knew that any particular child would die at a certain age, as at ten or twelve, you would adapt his education, and your whole treatment of him accordingly, and not trouble him with making him learn things which he would have no occaſion for till he

he was a man. But hoping and expecting that your children will grow to man's eſtate, you reaſonably endeavour to qualify them for it, and would be univerſally blamed if you did not.

Let us, then, believing that we are born for immortality, overlook the tranſitory enjoyments and purſuits of this uncertain life, and, inſtead of laying up (Matt. vi. 19) *treaſures on earth, where moth and ruſt corrupt, and where thieves break through and ſteal*, lay up *treaſures in heaven*, where none of theſe inconveniences happen, and *where our treaſure is, there let our hearts be alſo*.

2. If a life of virtue will alone enſure our happineſs hereafter, and vice our miſery, it certainly follows, that virtue is our greateſt good, and vice our greateſt evil. Conſequently, our principal endeavour through life, ſhould be the improvement of our moral character, to reſtrain every propenſity to the irregular indulgence of our appetites and paſſions, to cultivate every generous ſentiment of equity and humanity to our fellow-creatures, and habitual

habitual piety to God. Every thing elſe ſhould in reaſon be made ſubſervient to this one great end of human life. To be rich, or to be poor, to be maſter, or to be ſervant, to be healthy or diſeaſed, are mere trifles, and wholly inſignificant, compared with acting our part in life well, whatever that part be, that of a king or of a beggar, becauſe it is upon our acting the part aſſigned us *well*, and not at all upon the nature or comparative dignity of it, that our future well-being will depend.

3. In ſuch a world as this, in which it has pleaſed divine providence, and, no doubt, with the greateſt wiſdom, to place us, a ſtate of trial and of diſcipline, a ſtate in which temptations to vice and exceſs of every kind are continually before us, conſtant vigilance, and the moſt ſtrenuous exertion, are abſolutely neceſſary. In youth the love of pleaſure, in more advanced years objects of ambition and avarice, have ſtrong charms for men; and the love of theſe things cannot be kept within

within due bounds without the moſt unremitted attention, till a habit of moderation and ſelf government be acquired and confirmed. This habit once formed not only takes away all pain of reſtraint, but converts our duty into pleaſure. But, then, ſuch powerful habits as theſe, are not acquired without much reflection and exerciſe. Reſtraint of any kind (and all virtue, at firſt, is ſuch) is neceſſarily painful, and therefore will not be ſubmitted to without ſome ſtrong counteracting principle, without a principle of ſubmiſſion to ſome *authority*, as that of a parent, of a magiſtrate, of conſcience, or of God. This, as I ſhewed you, is the moſt certain and the moſt powerful of all, and it is no where ſo clearly aſcertained as in revelation. There we learn in the moſt intelligible language, what it is that the Lord our God requires of us, in order to live and to die in his favour, ſo as to ſecure a happy immortality.

Do not deceive yourſelves by imagining that this great prize, of *eternal life*, is to be attained without exertion and labour.

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Advantages far inferior to this are never ſecured without them; and can we expect that the greateſt of all good, ſhould be obtained ſo eaſily? Chriſtianity is, no doubt, the ſame thing now that it was in the time of Chriſt and the apoſtles: and he ſaid, (Matt. x. 37.) *He that loveth father or mother, ſon or daughter, wife or friend, more than me is not worthy of me, and he that taketh not up his croſs and followeth me is not worthy of me.* The apoſtle Paul frequently compares the life of a Chriſtian to a ſtate of *warfare*, as when he exhorts Chriſtians Tim. vi. 12. *to fight the good fight of faith*, and Eph. vi. 11. *to put on the whole armour of God.* He alſo compares it to a *race*, as when he ſays, 1 Cor. ix. 14. *ſo run that ye may obtain*, viz. what he calls (Phil. iii. 14.) *the prize of the high calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus.* Now both the ſtate of warfare, and the exerciſes of running and wreſtling, as practiſed in the Grecian games, to which the apoſtle alludes, required great preparation before the conteſt, and great exertion in the courſe of it.

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If we be chriſtians in earneſt, we muſt have the advantages of Chriſtianity, and the proſpect of its rewards in a future ſtate, ſo much at heart, that we ſhall prefer them to every other conſideration, to every thing in life, and to life itſelf. I do not ſay that they who cannot do this are no Chriſtians, or are to be numbered with the *wicked*, and conſigned to future puniſhment; but they cannot have any juſt claim to thoſe diſtinguiſhed rewards of Chriſtianity, which are promiſed to thoſe who are ſaid to have *overcome the world*, which implies a contending with great difficulties, and of whom it is ſaid (Rev. iii. 21.) that *they ſhall ſit down with Chriſt on his throne, as he alſo overcame, and is ſat down with his father on his throne.* In the houſe of God the kingdom of heaven, there are *many manſions*, and the choiceſt are reſerved for thoſe who (Acts iv. 22) *through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.* But as we do not content ourſelves with low attainments in this world when higher are within our reach, let the ſame ambition animate

animate us with reſpect to things of ſtill more value, in another world.

As there are all varieties of characters in men, and all gradations in every character, in this world, there will, no doubt, be a correſponding diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments in a future ſtate, though in a general way of ſpeaking, and in the ſcriptures, men are uſually divided into two claſſes, the righteous and the wicked. For the Judge of all the earth will, no doubt, do that which is *right*; and if ſo, there muſt be as great a variety of ſituations in the future world, as there are of characters and deſerts of men in this, though we may not be able to form any idea, or conjecture, in what manner this will, or can, be effected.

It may, indeed, be ſaid, and with truth, that if we love virtue at all, ſo as to be juſtly intitled to the character of *virtuous and conſcientious men*, we ſhall ſet no bounds to our love of it. For if, in any caſe, we give other objects and purſuits a preference to it, it is only in ſome caſes,

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and not univerſally, that we are diſpoſed to act the conſcientious and upright part; whereas God requires that we ſhould give him our whole hearts, we muſt (Matt. xxii. 37.) *love the Lord our God, with all the heart, with all the ſoul, and all the mind*, that is, we muſt be wholly devoted to his will, in doing and in ſuffering, in life and in death. The apoſtle James obſerves (chap. ii. 10.) that *he who keeps the whole law, but offends in one point, is guilty of all.* If there be any caſe in which a man wilfully and habitually offends, he certainly wants the proper *principle of obedience*, that is, a juſt reſpect for the divine authority, which would lead to an uniform and invariable regard to the laws of God. This is a proof that there is ſome vicious propenſity, to which, in his mind, every thing elſe will give way; and that, had he had as ſtrong a propenſity to any other gratification or purſuit, he would have been equally regardleſs of the authority of God in that caſe alſo. For he only obeys the laws of God, and the dictates of conſcience,

ſcience, when he feels no ſtrong temptation to tranſgreſs them.

In this caſe no perſon can properly be ſaid to be *a ſervant of God*, or of *righteouſneſs*, but only a ſlave to his own favourite appetite or paſſion. But we cannot ſerve God and mammon.

In the preſent ſtate of things, ſuch as we cannot doubt is the beſt for a ſtate of trial and diſcipline, a theatre on which to form great and excellent characters, a proper Chriſtian temper is neceſſarily a difficult attainment. To form a truly great character there muſt be many difficulties to ſtruggle with, evils of all kinds, moral as well as natural. For how could the greater virtues of forbearance, doing good againſt evil, reſignation, and truſt in God, be formed, but in a world in which men ſhould be expoſed to injuries of every kind. Not only could not real virtue be *tried*, and conſequently *known*, but it could not even be *formed*, or exiſt, in other circumſtances. And ſurely the character in which the virtues above mentioned exiſt is greatly

ſuperior

ſuperior to that of the generality of the world; who not comprehending its nature or value, will under-rate and deſpiſe it. With them what is commonly called a high ſpirit, and a promptneſs to revenge injuries, will be more admired and cultivated than a diſpoſition to pity and befriend the injurious perſon, which will be reckoned tame, and deſpicable; though certainly it muſt appear, on a little conſideration, that the latter is more truly magnanimous, implying a greater command of paſſion, and ſuperior reflection. It is no leſs evident that it is this prevailing *ſpirit of the world* which fills private life with quarrels, and which, entering into courts, fills the world with wars, the ſource of unſpeakable miſery; whereas a truly Chriſtian temper, a humble, meek, and benevolent diſpoſition would make the intercourſe of individuals, and of nations, the ſource of peace and of happineſs.

It is, however, no ſmall attainment to get above the cenſure and contempt of perſons whoſe minds are in a lower and more degraded ſtate than our own, when they

they are the great majority of the world we live in, and are likely to continue ſo. In this ſtate of things great exertion of mind is requiſite ſo far to overcome the world, as to poſſeſs our own minds in peace and joy. It can only be done by looking habitually towards a ſtate in which a truer judgment of characters will be formed, and in which thoſe who are really ſuperior here will be advanced to that ſtate of conſideration and reſpect to which they are intitled.

The real difference between a merely nominal believer, and an unbeliever is very ſmall, and of little conſequence, compared to the difference between the merely nominal and the real Chriſtian. What are the generality of Chriſtians, in what are called chriſtian countries? They are, in fact, perſons who mind nothing but their buſineſs, or their pleaſure, without giving any attention to the principles of chriſtianity at all. It is by no means the ſubject of their daily thoughts, it ſupplies no motives to their actions, it contributes nothing to moderate

moderate their joys, or to alleviate their ſorrows. It neither enables them to bear the troubles of life, nor does it give them any ſolid hope in death. Whereas the real Chriſtian, as the apoſtle ſays, Rom. xii. 15. *rejoices as though he rejoiced not, and weeps as though he wept not, becauſe the faſhion of this world paſſeth away*, and *the Lord is at hand.* He is ever *looking*, Tit. ii. 13. *to that bleſſed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God, and his Saviour Chriſt*, and has peace and joy in believing.

4. Chriſtianity is leſs to be conſidered as a ſyſtem of opinions, than a rule of life. But of what ſignification is a *rule*, if it be not be complied with? All the doctrines of chriſtianity have for their object chriſtian morals, which are no other than the well known duties of life; and the advantage we derive from this religion is that the principles of it aſſiſt us in maintaining that ſteady regard to the providence and moral government of God, and to a future ſtate, which facilitates and enſures the practice of thoſe duties; inſpiring greater

piety

piety towards God, greater benevolence to man, and that heavenly mindedneſs which raiſes the heart and affections above thoſe mean and low purſuits which are the ſource of almoſt all vices. But chriſtian principles not reflected upon, or attended to, cannot be accompanied with any advantage of this kind; and better, ſurely, were it to make no profeſſion of any principles, than to live without a due regard to them. Better, therefore, were it for any perſon to be an unbeliever in chriſtianity, than to be a Chriſtian, and live as if he had not been one. He deprives himſelf of all apology or excuſe, for his bad conduct. And it would, I fear, be happy for thouſands of profeſſing Chriſtians, if they had been born and lived among heathens.

We cannot too much impreſs upon our minds, that religion of any kind, is only a *means* to a certain *end*, and that this end is good conduct in life. Conſequently, if this end be not attained, we not only loſe the advantage of the means, or inſtrument, of which we were poſſeſſed, but

but are chargeable with the guilt of ſuch neglect, are guilty of an ungrateful contempt of the means that were afforded us for the greateſt and beſt of purpoſes; and can we expect that this will go unpuniſhed?

The guilt of *unbelief* does not conſiſt in mere diſbelieving. For *opinions* of any kind, as ſuch, bear no relation to *criminality*, but in refuſing to conſider with due ſerioufneſs and impartiality the evidence of chriſtianity that is laid before men; that refuſal ariſing from, and implying, ſome vicious prejudice, or improper bias. And if, in any particular caſe (and I doubt not there are ſuch) this refuſal does not ariſe from any vicious prejudice, there is nothing to blame in ſuch refuſal. If, for example, any perſon had no acceſs to the ſcriptures, by which he might have had the means of better information, and he was required to believe, as what was contained in them, things that he found it abſolutely impoſſible for him to believe, as that bread and wine were fleſh and blood,

or any thing elſe that appeared to him equally impoſſible, he muſt of neceſſity either be an unbeliever, or give up all pretence to common ſenſe.

No perſon, however, can be wholly innocent who does not weigh the difficulties of believing with thoſe of unbelief. Whatever difficulties any perſon finds, or are thrown in his way, he ſhould conſider the general evidence of the great facts on which chriſtianity is founded; and if that be ſufficient, he may be ſatisfied that, though he cannot for the preſent account for ſome particular appearances, or repreſentations, the difficulties occaſioned by this circumſtance cannot be inſuperable; ſince all truths are conſiſtent with one another. If it appear, from indiſputable hiſtorical evidence, that Chriſt wrought real miracles, if he died, and roſe from the dead, his religion is unqueſtionably from God, and then all the abſurdities charged upon his doctrine muſt have ariſen from ſome miſconception, or miſrepreſentation, though we may not be able to trace it. But it is no uncommon thing for a difficulty which

appears

appears inſuperable to day, to be cleared up to-morrow, as we ſee in many caſes.

The principles of chriſtianity, however, may be, and no doubt are, of great uſe when they are not explicitly attended to. They have been the means of eſtabliſhing ſuch maxims and habits in parents, as are afterwards communicated to their poſterity, more by the natural and ſilent operation of example, than by direct inſtruction; ſo that unbelievers, born of Chriſtian parents, and living in a chriſtian country, may be, in a manner, half Chriſtians, without their knowing it. Alſo mere nominal Chriſtians are, no doubt, often reſtrained from vices and irregularities forbidden by chriſtianity, without their being aware that the reſtraint comes originally from that quarter; having acquired habits of decent and proper conduct, which operate mechanically, and without any explicit regard to chriſtian principles, though originally derived from them.

There are alſo, all degrees of the influence of chriſtian principles, from the

exalted character of Chriſt and the apoſtles, and many others in every age, who had no other object of attention, and all whoſe thoughts, ſentiments, words, and actions, were under the conſtant influence of them, who lived as the apoſtle ſaid, as if *conſtantly ſeeing things inviſible*, Heb. xi. 27. by *faith and not by ſight*, 2 Cor. v. 7. as if the great ſcenes of the future world were preſent to them; there is a great difference, I ſay, between ſuch chriſtians as theſe, and thoſe of the loweſt order, who may, indeed, have read the ſcriptures, or part of them, and who retain ſome knowledge of them, and who entertain no doubt of their truth, but in their general conduct they give no explicit attention to them. Nevertheleſs the knowledge they have acquired has left ſome favourable impreſſions on their minds, ſome latent fear of God, and reſpect to his providence, and a world to come, which prevents the commiſſion of great crimes, and leads to an uniformly better conduct than they would otherwiſe have been capable of.

5. If

5. If we have any value for our religion, thinking it to be an uſeful inſtitution, and wiſh well to our fellow creatures, to whom we are therefore *deſirous* to recommend it, we ſhould be particularly careful to exhibit it to proper advantage, in our own diſpoſitions and conduct. It is to *this* that the generality of mankind, inattentive to reaſoning, will look, and not unjuſtly. Our Saviour himſelf ſaid of pretenders to prophecy, and of men in general, Matt. vii. 6. *By their fruits ye ſhall know them.* Indeed, as the only end of good principles is good practice, if the latter be not apparent, the former will not be inferred. On this account we muſt not confine our religion to our cloſets, but carry it with us into life, and in the buſineſs and buſtle of it, diſcover that ſuperior meekneſs, benevolence, and diſintereſtedneſs, which chriſtian principles tend to inſpire. We ſhould, in all reſpects, ſhew a greater command of our paſſions, and a greater freedom from the influence of a love of ſenſual pleaſure, of ambition, and

avarice

avarice, and from all thoſe vices which ariſe from an exceſſive love of the world, and the things of it, to which a regard to heaven and heavenly things, (on which alone our beſt affections ought to be ſet) naturally leads.

When this is done, but not before, the world in general will have an opportunity of perceiving the real effect of chriſtian principles; and if they be not properly influenced by it, the blame will not be ours. There can be no doubt but that, though on ſome the faireſt and moſt advantageous exhibition of chriſtian conduct may have an unfavourable effect, ſince as our Saviour obſerved, there are thoſe who (John. iii. 19.) *love darkneſs rather than light*, and that the *world*, which *loves its own* (xv. 9.) will hate his diſciples *becauſe they are not of the world*, this will be the caſe only with thoſe whoſe hearts are greatly corrupted. On others the effect muſt be favourable. As he ſays, (Matt. v. 6.) that *when our light ſhines before men they would ſee the good works of his diſciples, and glorify his father who is in heaven*

heaven. What he meant by *glorifying God*, we clearly ſee from his ſaying on another occaſion (John xv. 8.) *then is my father glorified when ye bring forth much fruit*, that is, *fruits of righteouſneſs*, which the apoſtle alſo ſays, (Phil. i. 11.) are *to the praiſe and glory of God.*

But, on the other hand, if, in the whole tenor of men's lives, there does not appear to be any difference between the Chriſtian and the man of the world, how can thoſe who have no other means of judging, or who will not have recourſe to any other, ſuppoſe that there is any advantage in the principles of the one more than in thoſe of the other? If the nominal Chriſtian behave juſt like other men, if he puts as little reſtraint upon himſelf in indulgences of any kind; if he be as ambitious, as avaricious, and as revengeful, when provoked; if he appear to have no greater regard to God, or love to mankind; ſhewing itſelf, as it natually will, in acts of kindneſs, generoſity, and mercy; if the Chriſtian appear to be in all reſpects, as much

much attached to the world, and the things of it, as other men are, they will naturally ſay, that all his pretences to a belief in a future world, a world prepared for the righteous only, are vain, when it is evident from his conduct, that this world has as full poſſeſſion of his heart as it has of thoſe of other men.

By this conduct, not becoming, and adorning, but diſgracing, his profeſſion, the nominal Chriſtian incurs the *woe* pronounced by our Saviour, (Matt. xviii. 7.) *It muſt needs be that offences come, but woe to the man by whom they come.* By this means we not only loſe the benefit of chriſtian principles ourſelves, but, by giving others an unfavourable opinion of chriſtianity, we indiſpoſe them to the reception of it, and conſequently deprive them of the benefit of it. Inſtead of being preachers of the goſpel, as every Chriſtian in ſome ſenſe or other ought to be, and which every chriſtian may be, at leaſt by his example, a perſon who is only a nominal Chriſtian, but a vicious man, is in fact a preacher of infidelity,

and

and does every thing that is in his power to unchriſtianize the world. On this account there was great uſe in the ſtrict diſcipline of the primitive church, which rejected all ſuch perſons from their communion. Vicious men were to them as *heathen men and publicans*. Being excluded from all connection with Chriſtians, and being known to be ſo, the cauſe of chriſtinity did not ſuffer by their miſconduct *.

It

* It has been unfortunate for the cauſe of chriſtianity, that eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, like the civil, is, in a great meaſure, an exhibition of vices, and of miſery. For theſe things are always moſt prominent, and catch the attention of the generality of obſervers; while the beneficial effects of religious, as well as of civil inſtitutions, are much leſs conſpicuous. The meek, the humble, and the heavenly minded, though the benevolent among Chriſtians, attract little attention, and therefore make no figure in the eye of an hiſtorian. Beſides, in all caſes, virtue is more common than vice; and on this account the latter attracts more attention. The former is like the gentle rain, or dew, which though it does infinite good, yet, becauſe it is common, is not ſo much noticed, as the deſtructive ſtorm or hurricane, which tears up every thing before it, and lays a whole country waſte.

Wealth and power will corrupt the hearts of men. It cannot, therefore, be thought extraordinary, if this was the effect of wealth and power in the biſhops of the greater ſees, and it is the conduct of theſe men about which eccleſiaſtical

6 It will be enquired by what means the influence of the world can be counteracted, or by what means a due attention to

cleſiaſtical hiſtory is moſt converſant; while the poor, the humble, and laborious teachers of chriſtianity, and their hearers in lower life, who were really influenced by its ſpirit, and laid themſelves out to do good, hoping for no reward but in heaven, paſſed unnoticed.

Occaſions, however, have frequently occurred, which drew out theſe men, and their principles, into public view. I mean ſeaſons of perſecution; and then it might be ſeen what the power of chriſtian principles really is. And when it is conſidered what numbers of Chriſtians have ſuffered for their religion, in the heathen, the Papal, and even proteſtant, perſecutions, what torture many of them endured, and, what is much more trying, of how long continuance were the ſufferings of many of them, in priſons and dungeons, where they lingered out their lives deſtitute of every comfort, when liberty, life, honour, and wealth, would have been the reward of a ſimple renunciation of their faith, it will be evident that there is in chriſtianity ſomething that has great power over the hearts and lives of men.

But the principal circumſtance to be attended to in the hiſtories of perſecutions is not the greatneſs, or the duration of the ſufferings of the martyrs, but the temper of mind with which they ſuffered; their piety, their patience, their meekneſs, their benevolence, their freedom from the ſpirit of revenge, and the good will which they ſhewed even to their enemies and perſecutors. This is an attainment of a truly extraordinary nature, which it is in vain that we look for among the heathens. This is not the diſpoſition with which the North American Indian bears his torture.

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to chriſtian principles can be beſt ſecured. I anſwer, the principal means to effect this great purpoſe, and one that will naturally lead to every other, is a familiar acquaintance with the ſcriptures. The zealous chriſtian will make theſe books his conſtant companions. With the pious Pſalmiſt (Pſalm i. 2.) *his delight will be in the law of the Lord, and in his law will he meditate day and night.*

Be aſſured that in reading the ſcriptures ever ſo often, you will always find ſomething new and intereſting. Many

Should perſecution again ariſe, chriſtian principles being the ſame that they ever were, would, I doubt not, produce as great and as extenſive effects. But I am far from wiſhing for an experiment of this kind. We are directed not to court, but to ſhun perſecution, if we can do it with integrity and honour, from which, however, we are never to ſwerve. And perhaps chriſtian principles undergo a trial no leſs ſevere in proſperity than in adverſity. It is commonly ſaid, and with truth, that if adverſity has ſlain its thouſands, proſperity has ſlain its ten thouſands. A ſeaſon of perſecution forces an attention to chriſtian principles, and unites numbers in the ſame cauſe; but in proſperity we muſt of our own accord, and without any external impulſe, give attention to chriſtian principles; and this the obtruſion of worldly objects too often prevents.

difficulties

difficulties you will, no doubt, meet with, as may be expected in books of such great antiquity, written many of them in a language which is but imperfectly understood, and abounding with allusions to customs with which we in this part of the world are unacquainted, and, which being in many respects the reverse of ours, will of course appear unnatural. But new light is thrown upon things of this nature every day. Many difficulties are already cleared up in the most satisfactory manner, and in the mean time every thing of this nature may be safely neglected, or referred to farther consideration, especially if you read for the purpose of moral improvement, the greatest part of the Bible being perfectly intelligible to every capacity, and in the highest degree useful and edifying.

A familiar acquaintance with the scriptures will preserve upon the mind a lively sense of God and his moral government. It will continually bring into view, and give you an habit of contemplating, the great plan of providence, respecting the

design

deſigns of God in the creation of man, and his ultimate deſtination. You will by this means have a clearer view of the divine wiſdom and goodneſs in the government of the world, even in the moſt calamitous events, as in the corruption of true religion, as well as in the reformation of it. You will perceive ſigns of order in the preſent ſeemingly diſordered ſtate of things, and will rejoice in the proſpect of the glorious completion of the ſcheme, in univerſal virtue and univerſal happineſs. Such views of things as theſe, which will be perpetually ſuggeſted by the reading of the ſcriptures, have the greateſt tendency to ennoble and enlarge the mind, to raiſe our thoughts and affections above the low purſuits which wholly occupy and diſtract the minds of the bulk of mankind, they will inſpire a moſt delightful ſerenity in the midſt of the cares and troubles of life, and impart *a joy which the world can neither give nor take away*.

By the frequent reading of the ſcriptures we ſhall be unavoidably led to the exerciſes of meditation, conſtant watchfulneſs

fulneſs, and prayer, and every other means of virtuous improvement, whatever has any tendency to repreſs what is vicious and defective, and promote what is moſt excellent in the human character.

The ſtudy of the ſcriptures, which contain the hiſtory of the tranſactions of God with men, and which furniſh topics of diſcuſſion proper for the exerciſe of the greateſt genius, is equally intereſting to the loweſt and the moſt improved of the human race. Sir Iſaac Newton, whoſe reputation as a philoſopher ſtands higher than that of any other man, devoted almoſt the whole of his time after he was turned forty (and he lived to the age of eighty-four) to theology; and from my perſonal knowledge I can ſay that ſome perſons now living, and lately living in England, who had greatly diſtinguiſhed themſelves, in mathematical and philoſophical purſuits, declared that, as they advanced in life, they had the moſt ſatisfaction in theological ones. Nor can this be thought extraordinary, when it is conſidered that

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theſe are ſubjects of infinitely more moment than any others to rational beings, born for immortality.

Let us then, my chriſtian brethren, whatever be our ſituation or employment in life, whether our purſuits relate to agriculture, manufactures, commerce, natural philoſophy, or any of the learned profeſſions; though we ſhould be employed in the more immediate ſervice of the public, in any civil, or military capacity, let us not forget that we are *men* and *Chriſtians*, and without neglecting the immediate and neceſſary buſineſs of this life, attend chiefly to what is of infinitely more importance, viz. our deſtination to *another;* and, accordingly be ſolicitous to act ſuch a part, and to cultivate ſuch habits, as will be our beſt preparation for it; that whenever we come to die, the great buſineſs of life may be done, and we may be like ſervants conſtantly looking for the return of their lord, that *when he ſhall return, and take an account of his ſervants, we may be found of him*, as the apoſtle ſays, 2 Pet. iii. 14. *without*

ſpot

ſpot and blameleſs, and not be aſhamed before him at his coming: but at the *great day*, emphatically ſo called, before the conſideration of which every thing elſe ſhould vaniſh like a ſhadow, we may hear the joyful ſentence, Matt. xxv. 21. *well done good and faithful ſervants, enter ye into the joy of your lord.*